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# POLICY Review

AUGUST & SEPTEMBER 2003, NO. 120, $6.00

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**WAR AND AFTERMATH**
FREDERICK W. KAGAN

**THE LIBERAL SPIRIT IN AMERICA**
PETER BERKOWITZ

**PARENTS OR PRISONS**
JENNIFER ROBACK MORSE

**FOREIGN POLICY IMMACULATELY CONCEIVED**
ADAM GARFINKLE

**ALSO: ESSAYS AND REVIEWS BY**
THOMAS MAIN, ELIZABETH ARENS,
AND BENJAMIN WALLACE-WELLS

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# War and Aftermath

*By* FREDERICK W. KAGAN

THE UNITED STATES HAS just fought two wars against enemies thought to be difficult to defeat and has won decisively, rapidly, and with minimal loss of life. The military performance in both cases was impressive. With virtually no American troops on the ground in Afghanistan, U.S. forces aided by local Afghan militias destroyed the Taliban government and shattered the al Qaeda bases and infrastructure that had been used to plan and prepare the September 11 attacks. In Iraq one British, one U.S. Marine, and two U.S. Army divisions, supported by advanced precision-guided munitions, sufficed to crush both the Iraqi army and Saddam Hussein's regime in a matter of weeks.

In both cases, the U.S. has been far less successful in winning the peace than it was in winning the war. In Iraq, the widespread looting and rioting that followed the collapse of the Baathist regime and the disorder that continued for weeks to rage in many parts of the country, including Baghdad,

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*Frederick W. Kagan is a military historian and the co-author of* While America Sleeps: Self-Delusion, Military Weakness, and the Threat to Peace Today *(St. Martin's Press, 2000).*



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badly tarnished the image of the American occupying forces. It hindered U.S. efforts to establish a new, stable Iraqi regime that commands the loyalty of the Iraqi people.

The situation in Afghanistan was much worse. For more than a year after the fall of the Taliban government, the new government of Hamid Karzai did not command the respect of the majority of the Afghan people and could not make its writ run outside of Kabul. Warlords established themselves in almost all of the other key cities and regions of the country, the roads became unsafe, and violence, both directed and random, became the order of the day. It remains unclear at present whether it will be possible actually to establish a stable and legitimate government in Kabul — and at what cost.

*The obstacles in the way of establishing stable polities in Kabul and Baghdad were always considerable.*

Why has the United States been so successful in recent wars and encountered so much difficulty in securing its political aims after the shooting stopped? The obstacles in the way of establishing stable polities in Kabul and Baghdad were always considerable. It was never likely that the road to peace and stability in postwar Iraq and Afghanistan would be short or smooth. The nature of the American military operations in both countries, however, multiplied those obstacles instead of reducing them and greatly increased the chance of failing to achieve the political objectives that motivated both wars.

The reason for this fact lies partly in the vision of war that President Bush and his administration brought into office and have implemented in the past two wars. This vision focuses on destroying the enemy's armed forces and his ability to command them and control them. It does not focus on the problem of achieving political objectives. The advocates of a "new American way of war," Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Bush chief among them, have attempted to simplify war into a targeting drill. They see the enemy as a target set and believe that when all or most of the targets have been hit, he will inevitably surrender and American goals will be achieved.

War is not that simple, however. From the standpoint of establishing a good peace it matters a great deal how, exactly, one defeats the enemy and what the enemy's country looks like at the moment the bullets stop flying. The U.S. has developed and implemented a method of warfare that can produce stunning military victories but does not necessarily accomplish the political goals for which the war was fought.

If these two wars represented merely isolated cases or aberrations from the mainstream of military and political developments in the U.S., then the study of this problem would be of primarily academic interest. That is not the case. The entire thrust of the current program of military transformation



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of the U.S. armed forces, on the contrary, aims at the implementation and perfection of this sort of target-set mentality. Unless the direction and nature of military transformation change dramatically, the American public should expect to see in the future many more wars in which U.S. armed forces triumph but the American political vision fails.

## The Bush administration's vision

GEORGE BUSH RAN for office with a clear understanding of what he wanted the armed forces to be and to do. In his 1999 campaign speech at the Citadel, he said that the purpose of the armed forces was to deter, fight, and win wars. He eschewed peacekeeping and nation-building entirely. He promised to withdraw rapidly from Kosovo and Bosnia, stating "we will not be permanent peacekeepers, dividing warring parties. That is not our strength or our calling." He declared, "Sending our military on vague, aimless and endless deployments is the swift solvent of morale." These announcements were enshrined in the motto, "superpowers don't do windows."

Candidate Bush's determination to avoid "operations other than war" (OOTW) was matched by a determination to transform the military. Clearly implying that the Clinton administration had let transformation go as part of its general neglect of the armed forces, Bush proclaimed that a new era would dawn. His transformation vision depended on information technology and the long-range precision strikes it made possible: "Power is increasingly defined, not by mass or size, but by mobility and swiftness. Influence is measured in information, safety is gained in stealth, and force is projected on the long arc of precision-guided weapons."

President Bush did not change his views on military affairs, even during and after the Afghan war. According to Bob Woodward's account in *Bush at War* (Simon and Schuster, 2002), the president announced at a critical meeting of his war cabinet during the Afghan war, "I oppose using the military for nation building. Once the job is done, our forces are not peacekeepers. We ought to put in place a U.N. protection and leave." That course of action turned out to be impossible, and thousands of American troops are still in Afghanistan today, supporting a weak and unstable government. One of the reasons for the weakness of that government is that the troops entered only after the critical damage had been done and in numbers far too small to achieve the political objective.

But Bush saw the war in Afghanistan as vindicating his vision of future war. In his December 2001 speech at the Citadel, the president declared, "Afghanistan has been a proving ground for this new approach. These past two months have shown that an innovative doctrine and high-tech weaponry can shape and then dominate an unconventional conflict. . . . The conflict in Afghanistan has taught us more about the future of our military than a



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decade of blue ribbon panels and think-tank symposiums." He concluded, "When all of our military can continuously locate and track moving targets — with surveillance from air and space — warfare will be truly revolutionized."

## "Network-Centric Warfare"

RUMSFELD SET OUT to implement Bush's transformation vision with enthusiasm. He established the Office of Force Transformation in October 2001 and gave it the mission of synchronizing all of the transformation efforts of the services. The vision that the new office would embody was made clear by the selection of its first director, retired Admiral Arthur K. Cebrowski. Cebrowski had served in the Navy for more than 37 years. He had commanded a carrier air wing, the aircraft carrier USS *Midway*, and the USS *America* carrier battle group. He saw combat in both Vietnam and Operation Desert Storm. He retired from the position of president of the Naval War College. The new vision resonated with his experience as a naval officer, since naval warfare is characterized by operations in a fluid medium against limited arrays of targets on sea or on land.

Cebrowski was the perfect man to head an office charged with implementing the administration's transformation vision. Not only had he served as Director, Command, Control, Communications, and Computers of the Joint Staff (the body under the Joint Chiefs of Staff), but he helped to develop and to publicize a distinct vision of future warfare called Network-Centric Warfare (NCW). As the new head of the Defense Department's transformation effort, Cebrowski enshrined NCW as the goal of that effort and has repeatedly declared that transformation programs in the services will be judged by the extent to which they approach the NCW ideal.

It is difficult to define what, exactly, Network-Centric Warfare is. The clearest and most detailed exposition of the idea is given by David S. Alberts, John J. Gartska, and Frederick P. Stein in a book called *Network Centric Warfare: Developing and Leveraging Information Superiority* (CCRP Publications, second edition, 1999). Two of the authors were serving on the Joint Staff at the time the book was published, and the other was a retired U.S. Army colonel. Admiral Cebrowski figures prominently in the acknowledgments.

Alberts, Gartska, and Stein explain NCW in these terms:

> We define NCW as an information superiority-enabled concept of operations that generates increased combat power by networking sensors, decision makers, and shooters to achieve shared awareness, increased speed of command, higher tempo of operations, greater lethality, increased survivability, and a degree of self-synchronization. In essence,



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> NCW translates information superiority into combat power by effectively linking knowledgeable entities in the battlespace.

NCW thus aims to use the "near-perfect" intelligence that American satellites, aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and other "sensors" are supposed to provide to permit commanders to identify the right targets and destroy them with precision-guided munitions.

NCW reflects an effort to translate a business concept of the 1990s into military practice. It is drawn explicitly from the examples of companies like Cisco Systems, Charles Schwab, Amazon.com, American Airlines, and Dell Computers, among others. According to *Network Centric Warfare*, all of these companies attained dramatic "competitive advantages" in their fields by creating vast and complex information networks. These companies can predict the level and types of product inventory they will need by tracking the orders of all of their customers. They can keep those inventories low by informing suppliers the moment products leave the shelves. They remain maximally adaptable by building products to the exact specifications of each customer and only when the customer wants them. In every case, information technology permitted enormous efficiencies by allowing corporations to make accurate predictions, minimize risk, and adapt rapidly to changing circumstances.

*Many of the age-old precepts of how to organize armed forces and fight wars will have to be abandoned.*

NCW applies this concept to the military. The key is achieving information superiority over the enemy: in lay terms, knowing more about ourselves, the battlefield, and the enemy than the enemy does and preventing him from knowing about us. Information superiority promises new capabilities in warfare: "Achieving information superiority increases the speed of command preempting adversary options, creates new options, and improves the effectiveness of selected options. This promises to bring operations to a successful conclusion more rapidly at a lower cost." The key to attaining and using information superiority lies in the network. All of the sensors available to the armed forces must be linked together electronically, from satellites to individual soldiers. They must be linked seamlessly with the commanders and the "shooters" to provide them with a "common operational picture," a shared vision of what is going on throughout the battlespace, the area in which operations are being conducted. This common operational picture allows commanders to make decisions more rapidly and bring precision fires to bear on the enemy more quickly and with greater effect.

The effect of NCW will be revolutionary and transformative, it is claimed. Many of the age-old precepts of how to organize armed forces and fight



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wars will have to be abandoned. The creation of a complete network and the application of the various other concepts associated with NCW will "for the first time . . . provide us with the possibility of moving beyond a strategy based upon attrition, to one based upon shock and awe."

## Shock and awe

"SHOCK AND AWE" is a complicated concept. It was developed in the mid-1990s by a team of former military officers and expounded in a book entitled *Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance* in 1996 by Harlan K. Ullman and James P. Wade, two officers retired from the Navy and the Army respectively. Since the goal of NCW is achieving "shock and awe," it is worthwhile to examine the meaning and implications of that concept, especially in light of its explicit invocation during the most recent war against Iraq.

"Shock and awe" relies upon having unprecedented information superiority over the enemy. The key will be "dominant battlespace awareness," through which "the United States should be able to obtain perfect or near-perfect information on virtually all technical aspects of the battlefield and therefore be able to defeat or destroy an adversary more effectively, with fewer losses to ourselves and with a range of capabilities from long-range precision strike to more effective close-in weapons." This aspect of the concept raises significant technical concerns, since "dominant battlespace awareness" means not merely knowing what is going on perfectly, but having "the means to anticipate and to counter all opposing moves." The Air Force has adopted this concept to such an extent that a press release identifies as a critical "enabler" of its Global Strike Task Force a concept known as "predictive battlespace awareness . . . which provides decision-makers the ability to predict what actions the enemy is most likely to make."

"Shock and awe" will use this remarkable intelligence ability to neutralize the enemy's "ability to command; to provide logistics; to organize society." In a comparison that horrified some international observers when the Bush administration promised to apply "shock and awe" to Iraq, Ullman and Wade explain that "Shutting the [enemy] country down would entail both the physical destruction of appropriate infrastructure and the shutdown and control of the flow of all vital information and associated commerce so rapidly as to achieve a level of national shock akin to the effect that dropping nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had on the Japanese."

Significant ground forces, in this picture, are to be used only if the enemy does not come quickly enough to heel in the aftermath of the "shock and awe" attack. The attack on the enemy's critical infrastructure and armed forces by long-range precision weapons must be protracted in order to "demonstrate to the adversary our endurance and staying power, that is, the



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capability to dominate over as much time as is necessary less [sic] an enemy mistakenly try to wait it out and use time between attacks to recover sufficiently. If the enemy still resisted, then conventional forms of attack would follow resulting in the physical occupation of territory. Control is thus best gained by the demonstrated ability to sustain the stun effects of the initial rapid series of blows long enough to affect the enemy's will and his means to continue."

"Shock and awe," Network-Centric Warfare, dominant (or predictive) battlespace awareness — these are the critical concepts that define the current visions of U.S. military transformation as they are being planned, programmed, and executed today. They rely unequivocally on having essentially perfect intelligence about the enemy such that American commanders will be able to predict what he will do in time to take action to prevent it. They also rely on the ability, both technical and political, to destroy whatever targets this perfect intelligence tells the commanders are critical to shocking and awing the enemy.

## The politics of regime change

There is a great deal of merit to the concepts of NCW and "shock and awe." The idea of networking all of the sensors, commanders, and shooters in the armed forces and creating common operational pictures is a good one and should be pursued aggressively. NCW's goals of making the armed forces more adaptive, responsive, and versatile are also laudable. The "shock and awe" goal of defeating the enemy rapidly and decisively has been the aim of every major military from the dawn of time and should remain the goal of our military today. The dubiety of the concepts of perfect intelligence and "predictive battlespace awareness" are more troublesome, but they cannot be explored further in this article.

The most important problem with these visions of war is not anything within them, but the fact that they leave out the most important component of war — that which distinguishes it from organized but senseless violence. Neither NCW nor "shock and awe" provides a reliable recipe for translating the destruction of the enemy's ability to continue to fight into the accomplishment of the political objectives of the conflict.

Both NCW and "shock and awe" focus on the rapidity with which the U.S. will begin, conduct, and end hostilities. They also insist that the American armed forces must retain a much lighter "footprint" in the theater. Because the information age has dramatically increased our ability to move information without increasing our ability to move tangible objects, it has made (in the words of *Network Centric Warfare*) "the movement of information far less costly than the movement of physical things. Thus, the economic dynamics of the information age will drive solutions that leave people and machines where they are (a smaller in-theater footprint), and use



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information to make those in theater more effective — that is, to find ways to put them in the right place more often, and mass effects rather than forces. Only the pointy end of the spear will move on the battlefield of the future." The question at once emerges: What happens behind the pointy end of the spear? That is a critical question in war, because what happens behind the pointy end of the spear may well determine the political outcome of the campaign.

President Bush has transformed American security policy by declaring a doctrine not only of preemptive (or preventive) action, but of regime change. The U.S. has fought two such wars already since 9-11, and Bush has made it clear repeatedly that he is willing to contemplate others. Regime change is a complicated business. As historians of revolutionary wars know well, it is much easier to destroy a sitting regime than to establish a legitimate and stable new one. Cycles of violence in Latin America and Africa, the Soviet failure in Afghanistan, Napoleon's defeat in Spain all show how readily even a relatively stable and secure government can be overthrown from within or without — and how difficult it can be to bring an end to the chaos and violence that normally follow. The true center of gravity in a war of regime change lies not in the destruction of the old system, but in the creation of the new one. NCW and "shock and awe" are silent on that most important task.

*The primary mechanism for influencing the situation in both concepts is destroying things and killing people.*

Both theories rely predominantly on long-range precision-guided munitions fired from aircraft, from naval ships, and, in some cases, from limited numbers of ground vehicles. The primary mechanism for influencing the situation in both concepts is destroying things and killing people. It is easy to ask flippantly whether that is not what war is all about. The answer is no. *Combat* is characterized by breaking things and killing people; *war* is about much more than that.

If the most difficult task facing a state that desires to change the regime in another state is securing the support of the defeated populace for the new government, then the armed forces of that state must do more than break things and kill people. They must secure critical population centers and state infrastructure. They have to maintain order and prevent the development of humanitarian catastrophes likely to undermine American efforts to establish a stable new regime. The notion articulated by the advocates of "shock and awe" that the U.S. should destroy the infrastructure that keeps the enemy's *country* functioning reflects the degree to which they ignore this problem.

To be fair, this problem is a new one in the history of war. Never has it been possible to destroy the enemy's armed forces and command and con-



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trol centers without also physically occupying his territory. The only previous attempt was the strategic bombing of World War II, which substituted destruction for occupation. The advent of precision-guided munitions and expert targeting systems has made it possible to destroy the enemy's ability to wage war without killing his civilians and even, if given enough time, skill, and luck, without occupation. The current generation of transformation enthusiasts has largely seized upon that fact as a liberation from the need to use ground forces, but they have not, for the most part, recognized its liabilities.

Imagine the following scenario. The U.S. has decided to change the regime in country X, which is currently ruled by an oppressive dictatorship actively hostile to America. U.S. armed forces launch a campaign of "shock and awe" using NCW concepts and systems. They shatter the command and control of the armed forces and the paramilitary police. They destroy all of the communications systems in the country. They take down significant parts of the electrical power grid in order to get at systems hidden in civilian areas that they prefer not to bomb directly for fear of collateral casualties. They destroy a significant number of enemy military systems. Let us imagine that, faced with this destruction, the enemy government breaks and flees (although recent events in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, and elsewhere highlight the dangers of lightly accepting this critical assumption of both NCW and "shock and awe"). Let us suppose, finally, that the entire campaign was conducted with no significant American presence in the country. What is the situation in X?

*The destruction of the army and a paramilitary police have deprived the society of all law and order.*

The destruction of the army and a paramilitary police have deprived the society of all law and order. Jubilant crowds liberated from an oppressive tyranny sack and loot government offices — and, carried away in their enthusiasm, begin the process of "wealth redistribution" on a large scale. Collaborators and suspected collaborators of the regime are summarily killed when they can be found, and such activities serve also as a cover for the settling of many a private score. Local individuals rise to power in various regions based on their abilities to get their neighbors to work together to restore order and essential services. When American (or U.N.) forces finally roll in to try to install a government of the variety desired, the locals frequently view them with mistrust and hostility. Some even become nostalgic for the old, brutal regime because they enjoyed a greater degree of security.

They may resent the fact that American bombs shattered their society and created a humanitarian crisis despite the fact that those bombs were carefully aimed to avoid harming them directly. They may equally resent U.S.



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efforts to install leaders suitable to American interests despite the pragmatic choices of the local populace. At a minimum, the normal functioning of the society in X has been crushed under the weight of "shock and awe," and the absence of American ground forces has created a vacuum calling forth all of the baser and most violent instincts of the locals — in addition, no doubt, to some of the nobler ones. This scenario is the likely result of the application of "shock and awe" and NCW as they are embodied in U.S. military transformation plans.

This description is not so much of Iraq but of Afghanistan. In Iraq the presence of the equivalent of four divisions provided the coalition with the ability to control Baghdad and Basra and, subsequently (and with some difficulty), Mosul, Tikrit, and other important population centers. There were not enough ground forces to do the job adequately, and they were not sufficiently trained to transition immediately from war-fighting to peacekeeping. The deliberate destruction of the Iraqi communication system and parts of its power grid during the war compromised that transition even more. The violence and looting were among the results, and they tarnished America's image in Iraq and in the world as well, hindering the development of a new regime in Iraq in accord with U.S. wishes. With more ground forces immediately available and a better thought-out plan for using them as the war ended, much of this difficulty could have been avoided. It is unlikely that those failures will have denied us the achievement of our political goal in Iraq, but they have certainly made it harder.

*When the Taliban broke and fled, no one was in control of the country.*

But Afghanistan, not Iraq, is the model for America's future wars according to our transformation programs. And the outcome of that way of war resembles the grim scenario pictured above much more closely. Throughout the conduct of active operations against the Taliban, the U.S. had only a handful of Special Forces (SF) soldiers on the ground and no forces from the regular Army or Marines at all. The SF troops worked with local Afghan militias to help them communicate with each other and, most important, with American aircraft and ships that could rain down precision-guided munitions on appropriate Taliban targets. Many of those militias were bribed to fight with CIA money, which was much easier to get into Afghanistan than American ground forces.

When the Taliban broke and fled, however, no one was in control of the country. The Northern Alliance occupied Kabul, but everyone knew that they could not simply form a government, since they represented only minority ethnicities within Afghanistan. Friendly Pashtun tribes occupied Kandahar and its surroundings, but they proved remarkably reluctant to purge their ranks of Taliban and al Qaeda sympathizers. Elsewhere, regional



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warlords used their CIA money to set up their own independent palatinates. Violence broke out across the country. It became impossible for individuals to travel safely from one city to another without encountering roadblocks belonging to warlords and independent bandits. Fighting broke out among rival groups.

With great difficulty, the U.S. managed to broker the formation of a government it found suitable — one that awarded de facto control of the country to its Northern Alliance friends with the fig leaf of Pashtun control in the form of President Hamid Karzai. That government was unable to establish its legitimacy beyond Kabul for more than a year, and even now the painstaking process continues only because it is supported by thousands of American and international troops. It is hard to imagine that those troops will be able to withdraw anytime soon without completely undermining the stability of the new regime. Regime change via precision weapons in Afghanistan has created a mess for which the U.S. is responsible.

*Despite Bush's hostility to the concept, American soldiers have extensive experience with peacekeeping.*

What would the scenario look like if American ground forces were present in sufficient numbers with adequate training and planning for the transition from war to peace? First, there would be no doubt about who was in control and no power vacuum. The armed forces that had defeated the old government, and that thereby held the respect of the population, would be visibly in charge of the new situation. The likelihood is that the locals would mostly simply adapt to the change of leadership rather than attempting to take advantage of the situation for their own benefit. It would not be necessary to put down individuals claiming to wield local authority before installing a government that suited U.S. political goals. It would be much easier, therefore, for that new government to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the people, since it would not seem to be usurping the authority of a nascent "native" government.

In addition, despite Bush's hostility to the concept, American soldiers and Marines have extensive experience with peacekeeping. They know how to separate hostile groups, how to restore police authority and keep order, how to dispense food and medical supplies. They even know how to set up emergency hospitals, generators, and water purification and treatment plants and how to get sewage systems working again. In short, American soldiers and Marines can provide all of the essential services necessary to keep a defeated society functioning, to stave off humanitarian disasters, and to prevent the population from becoming resentful at the destruction of their lives and society and the collapse of order. They can establish the critical preconditions for a relatively smooth transfer of power from the defeated regime to the desired



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one — but only if they are there from the outset. The current Defense Department programs make it unlikely that they will be.

# Transformation programs

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION has been allocating defense resources in accord with the priorities and vision of future war defined by NCW and "shock and awe." All of the major transformation efforts in the military services and the major military systems under research, development, and construction focus on improving the armed forces' ability to destroy enemy targets precisely, rapidly, and from hundreds (or thousands) of miles away. One Air Force officer went so far as to claim that it is possible "that in our lifetime we will be able to run a conflict without ever leaving the United States."

The systems highlighted in the Department of Defense's press release describing the FY 2004 budget request demonstrate this trend. Apart from national missile defense and upgrades to the Patriot air defense system, the main programs described as being transformational were: the Navy's CVN21 aircraft carrier, the DDX land-attack destroyer, the CG(X) air defense cruiser, the conversion of four Trident ballistic missile submarines to carry land-attack Tomahawk cruise missiles and Special Forces teams, new satellite systems, new digital communications systems, space-based radar, unmanned aerial vehicles, the Army's Future Combat System, Stryker Interim Brigade Combat Teams, and the Comanche helicopter. The budget also includes support for the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) and the F-22.

In general terms, the Navy is working hard to get its ships closer to the coastlines of enemy states so that they can participate more effectively in the precision-strike operations that are rapidly becoming their primary reason for existence. Considerable doubts have arisen about the utility of the JSF and the F-22, but the Air Force has been able to save those programs by arguing that they, too, support transformation by augmenting U.S. precision-strike capabilities. All of the services are working hard to implement the technical concepts of Network-Centric Warfare in their systems, and even to retrofit older systems with the new technology.

The Army's programs are also taking that service firmly in the direction of NCW and focusing on the ability to attack the enemy from stand-off ranges. The technological core of the Objective Force — the Army of the future — is the Future Combat System (FCS). The FCS is a "family of systems" including the equivalents of tanks and infantry carriers as well as unmanned aerial vehicles and robots. In a white paper, the Army describes the role of the Objective Force on the battlefield as follows:

> Objective Force Units will see first, understand first, act first and finish decisively as the means to tactical success. Operations will be character-



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> ized by developing situations out of contact; maneuvering to positions of advantage; engaging enemy forces beyond the range of their weapons; destroying them with precision fires; and, as required, by tactical assault at times and places of our choosing. Commanders will accomplish this by maneuvering dispersed tactical formations of Future Combat Systems units linked by web-centric C4ISR capabilities for common situational dominance.

The emphasis throughout this vision is on stand-off capabilities. The situation will be developed "out of contact," that is, by satellite and airborne sensors rather than by the armed reconnaissance of ground elements. Yet one of the advantages of using ground forces to conduct reconnaissance is that the very presence of such forces compels the enemy to react. In this way it is possible to gain an understanding not only of where the enemy is, but also of how he is likely to behave when the attack begins. Long-range sensors cannot discern these characteristics of an enemy force because frequently the enemy does not know how he will react until he is actually confronted with a particular situation. It is clear that "developing the situation" has come to mean, even for the Army, simply identifying targets.

Once the target set has been developed, Objective Force units will fire their own long-range precision munitions and destroy the enemy before they come into range of his own weapons. In this way, they will largely duplicate capabilities that the other services have already perfected. It matters not at all where a precision weapon is launched from as long as it can reach and destroy its target. Having ground forces that can deliver such weapons does not, by itself, present any advantage over having air and sea forces that can do so if the objective is simply target destruction.

The Army has adopted this approach for two major reasons. The first is casualty aversion. The safest way to fight is never to be within range of the enemy's guns. Army leaders, laudably trying to minimize American casualties, have seen in the superior range and destructiveness of stand-off weapons a way to achieve that goal. The other reason, however, is that it seems highly likely that individual FCS vehicles will be unable to survive in close combat with enemy systems.

## Deployability vs. survivability

THE ARMY HAS identified "deployability" as the most critical characteristic of its future forces. They must be able to move from the U.S. to anywhere overseas in a matter of hours. The Army leadership has concluded, therefore, that weapons systems must be lighter. That conclusion means that, at least for the foreseeable future, those systems will not be able to withstand direct enemy attack as well as current systems do.

The Objective Force gets around this problem by redefining the concept



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of "survivability." In the past, a vehicle was survivable if its armor plating was thick enough to withstand the impact of enemy weapons. The problem is that such armor protection today is extremely heavy: The M1 tank weighs 70 tons. It is not at all clear that materials permitting a much lighter vehicle to have the same degree of protection will be developed by 2008, the target date for fielding the first elements of the FCS.

So now the Objective Force relies not on being able to survive enemy attacks, but on being able to destroy the enemy before he *can* attack. Survivability has become an offensive function: "Objective Force survivability will be linked to its inherently offensive orientation, as well as its speed and lethality. By seizing the initiative and seeing, understanding, and acting first, the Objective Force will enhance its own survivability through action and its retention of the initiative." This issue was put even more clearly in a recent evaluation of the progress of the development of the FCS family of vehicles: "Survivability is uniquely dependent on the effectiveness of network integration to ensure that the FCS [Unit of Action — equivalent to a brigade] can see first, understand first, and act first, [sic] finish decisively. The objective is to engage and destroy the enemy before the enemy can close with the FCS [Unit of Action]." Because information superiority will permit the Army to avoid close combat, lightness is regarded as a virtue in itself.

Although Army transformation papers always make a point of adding that the FCS vehicles must be able to survive on their own, their own concepts for employing the system belie that claim. If the systems can survive on their own, then their survivability is not "uniquely dependent" on being able to "see first, understand first, and act first." The repeated statements of that dependence bring into question the Army's own belief about the ability of its systems to survive enemy attacks on their own.

This problem is central to Army transformation, although it is generally relegated to the last few slides and covered very quickly in Army briefings. If the systems cannot survive on their own in the presence of enemy forces, if they can survive only by killing everything that might harm them, then they cannot play their necessary role in operations other than war, including those supporting the transition from war to peace.

## Shock, awe, and peacekeeping

THE ADVOCATES OF NCW and "shock and awe" do not ignore peacekeeping, nation-building, and other operations other than war. In 1995, the Institute for National Strategic Studies Center for Advanced Command Concepts and Technology at the National Defense Univeristy held a workshop to consider approaches to the development of technologies applicable to such situations. It discussed non-lethal weapons, the use of advanced technological training systems to prepare troops for OOTW, the development of body armor and improved language translation



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capabilities, and intelligence systems. The latter consisted of sensors, displays, and dissemination methods/devices. According to *OOTW: The Technological Dimension* (National Defense Univeristy Press, 1995), sensors included "humans with enhanced capability (night vision, etc.) to micro-sensors that monitor and report on the operational and tactical situations. Unmanned or remote sensors can substitute for humans and thereby limit troop exposure in dangerous areas."

The application of such technological developments to OOTW environments holds a certain amount of promise, but the key will be in the approach to the problem those technologies are applied to. Here the situation is more worrisome. The authors of *Shock and Awe* (one of whom participated in the study on technologies in OOTW) believe that their approach to war is also an approach to operations other than war:

> In OOTW, the Rapid Dominance J[oint] T[ask] F[orce] might function as follows. First, the ability to deploy dominant force rapidly to attack or threaten to attack appropriate targets could be brought to bear without involving manpower-intense or manned sensors and weapons. Second, once deployed, since self-defense is likely to be required against small arms, mines, and shoulder carried or mortar weapons, certainly some form of "armor" or protective vehicles and shelters would be necessary. However, through the UAVs, C4I, and virtual reality systems, as well as through signature management and other Shock and Awe weapons including High Powered Microwave (HPM) and "stun-like" systems, this force would have more than dominant battlefield awareness.

The continued emphasis on reducing the number of American troops deployed in the theater (it is odd to call the area in which operations other than war take place a "battlefield") by relying on robots and UAVs and on finding and attacking targets highlights an incomprehension of the basic problems entailed in OOTW. The throwaway line that armor will continue to be important in OOTW is not persuasive in the context of theories that argue that armor has no validity in future combat. Will the U.S. stand up "peacekeeping" or "OOTW" units that are armored while removing the armor from the rest of the force? It seems unlikely. American forces in OOTW missions are likely to have the same systems that rely on "seeing first" and "shooting first" as the rest of the Army.

But peacekeepers cannot shoot everyone who *might* harm them. There are many situations, even in war, in which it will not be desirable to destroy every enemy tank and military vehicle that *might* come within range of our systems. Success in such operations relies on taking risks mitigated by the fact that American soldiers have a sporting chance of survival even if the enemy opens fire. In many circumstances it is highly desirable to allow the enemy to take the first shot. Otherwise, the peacekeeping force risks generating a crisis that might otherwise have been avoided and compromising the



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success of its own mission.

But forces in lightly armored vehicles that rely on their ability to kill things to survive cannot afford to let the enemy shoot first. The best they could hope for would be intelligence systems that would warn them *every time* someone was *about* to shoot at them — so they could kill first. But how will that look on CNN? The world, and the locals, will see only a succession of "unprovoked" American attacks on "innocent villagers." This entire doctrine is inappropriate to any concept of OOTW that stands a chance of achieving political success.

In sum, Army transformation has taken the same path as the rest of defense transformation, focusing on the rapid identification and destruction of targets from great distances at the expense of the capabilities needed to mingle with the local population and enemy military forces safely and effectively in a complex peacekeeping or transitional environment. The rest of the transformation program is developing in such a way as to value stand-off weapons over the employment of any ground forces at all. The flaws in Army transformation may thus become irrelevant because of the larger flaws inherent in defense transformation overall.

## Operation Iraqi Freedom

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM has done nothing to slow these trends. As the war ended, a chorus began to sing the praises of military transformation as demonstrated in that war. One reporter declared, "Iraq, in fact, may be remembered as the first true war of the information age, when command-and-control technology took over the battlefield." Vice President Cheney claimed that the war provided "proof positive of the success of our efforts to transform our military." Cebrowski himself gleaned lessons from the conflict that reinforce the direction in which transformation was already headed. As *Aerospace Daily* reported (April 23, 2003), a " 'fertile area' to research for lessons learned, he said, is the level of network-centric warfare practiced by small units or isolated systems — the 'last mile of connectivity.' . . . A key focus will be studying 'differences in performance and tactics by people who were well-connected at the tactical level and who were not.'" Asked about the role the M1 tanks played in the war, Cebrowski concluded that "the Army's tanks should be at most half the weight they are now, but equipped with better sensors to improve situational awareness. 'I come down more on the speed and information side,' he said."

Although some observers, most of them attached to the Army, have attempted to argue that this war demonstrated the continued centrality of ground forces, the trend is very much in the other direction. More and more, Operation Iraqi Freedom is used to emphasize the importance and value of long-range stand-off weapons systems and their superiority to "traditional" methods of war that include the use of ground forces. Once again, the



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mantra is that we have entered a "new era" and are developing a "new American way of war." It is natural that, in such a context, the focus of attention should be on the things that are new, such as the concepts of NCW and our weapons that are described as not merely smart, now, but "brilliant."

But is this lesson the right one? Did Iraqi Freedom really prove that NCW is opening the path to a bright new dawn in which ground forces — indeed, manned weapons systems of any variety — will be unnecessary? Such conclusions are overdrawn and proceed more from seeing what some would like to see than from carefully examining the events themselves. In many respects, even the questions are wrong. If one starts by asking whether or not the war has "proven" the validity of NCW concepts, there is a great danger of focusing so closely on that question as to miss the bigger picture.

*The sanctions the U.N. imposed on Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait eviscerated Saddam's attempts to restore his military.*

How did we actually win the war? One problem that bedevils this question is that the Iraqi armed forces were in poor shape to confront us. The U.S. and its allies smashed the Iraqi military thoroughly in 1991. They destroyed enormous quantities of the most significant Iraqi equipment, including a large percentage of Iraq's modern tank and artillery systems. Saddam had to remove entire units from his order of battle. The Tawakalna Republican Guards division destroyed at the Battle of 73 Easting, for instance, was disbanded completely and had not even a namesake in the most recent conflict.

The sanctions the U.N. imposed on Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait eviscerated Saddam's attempts to restore his military. He was unable to replace destroyed hardware and unable to train his army properly even to 1991 levels, let alone to the level that would have been necessary to pose a serious challenge to U.S. forces today. Because of U.N.-imposed "no-fly" zones, he was not in control of large portions of his own territory. U.S. and British warplanes had been bombing his antiaircraft sites and radar installations for a decade.

Saddam's plan to seed the rear of the coalition forces with Fedayeen was inventive but inadequate. Those troops did not have the weapons necessary to conduct the guerrilla warfare Saddam had wished, which would have been challenging in any case given Iraq's terrain. Saddam also intended, wisely, to blow up the bridges that led over the Euphrates and, perhaps, the Tigris. For unknown reasons his troops failed to execute that plan, which might well have delayed the coalition offensive significantly.

Above all, Saddam seems to have relied on an overly optimistic notion of what would happen at the level of international politics. He seeded Basra,



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Najaf, Baghdad, and other critical cities with troops specifically intended to prevent the populations from "going over" to the coalition. He eschewed the use of chemical and biological weapons, although he did lob some banned (but conventionally armed) missiles at coalition forces and Kuwait. He seems to have been determined to prevent U.S. forces from entering Baghdad for as long as possible. Rather than deploying his troops within the city, as many in the West had feared he would, he deployed the bulk of his Republican Guard troops to the south of his capital and attempted to fight coalition forces as they advanced. When allied air and ground attacks had seriously depleted the ranks of those defenders, he even reinforced them with troops drawn from further north.

*Saddam hoped that, as the war dragged on, outrage against the coalition attack would mount.*

The likeliest explanation is that Saddam hoped that, as the war dragged on, outrage against the coalition attack would mount. The French, Germans, Russians, Belgians, and Chinese had all manifested hostility to the invasion. Saddam may well have hoped that if the U.S. did not win speedily, those countries would press America and Britain to accept a compromise. He may also have hoped that the sight of American forces in Iraq and the deaths of Arabs, played up graphically and dramatically on al-Jazeera, would provoke an explosion in the "Arab street" that would at least distract the coalition and, possibly, force it to negotiate a settlement that left him, or perhaps a relative, in power in Iraq.

As a result of this strategy, whatever precisely had motivated it, Saddam did not make things as hard for the coalition as he might have. A large proportion of his military equipment remained in compact, concentrated formations in the open — presenting excellent and easy targets for our airpower. It is worth noting that the presence of American ground troops in significant numbers was the primary reason for this deployment. Having decided, for whatever reason, to oppose the advance of the coalition ground forces, Saddam had to concentrate his own troops to do so. If there had been no coalition ground offensive, it is almost certain that Saddam would have dispersed his own ground troops to positions of better cover and thereby made their destruction from the air more arduous and time-consuming.

Rather than concentrating the zealots who made up the Saddam Fedayeen for a climactic battle in the streets of Baghdad, moreover, Saddam dispersed them in small pockets throughout the country, where they were unable to achieve anything of operational significance. He did little to try to impede the rapid forward movement of coalition forces. The bottom line is that the coalition forces could probably have "demonstrated" the "validity" of just about any concept of war against such a foe.



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It is possible, nevertheless, to discern some lessons from this war as long as we are careful to consider not merely what Saddam did, but what a more skillful and better prepared enemy might have done in his place. And there were a number of events that are quite revealing about the limitations of the NCW and "shock and awe" approaches, and about the continued significance of heavy ground forces.

Coalition airpower and precision capabilities played a critical role in this victory, to be sure. Using a high proportion of "smart" munitions, including new satellite-guided bombs and bombs specifically designed to destroy bunkers, the air attack severely degraded Saddam's ability to command and control his forces, as well as destroying a significant (if yet to be determined) percentage of those forces directly. Apparently Saddam was reduced to using runners to send messages to his scattered units at times to try to keep them in the loop. By accomplishing these tasks, the air campaign made the ground campaign possible. Coalition forces could not have advanced as rapidly with as little concern for their flanks and rear without the successful air campaign.

But the air campaign by itself could not have won this war as rapidly or as decisively as the joint air-land attack did. The "shock and awe" campaign failed to accomplish its hoped-for goal of convincing Saddam or his lieutenants to surrender. The reason for this failure has been disputed. Harlan Ullman, one of the authors of *Shock and Awe*, deprecated the air campaign the Pentagon had claimed would induce "shock and awe": "What they announced at the beginning of the war as shock and awe seems to me was largely PR," he told the *Washington Times* (March 31, 2003). "It did not bring the great shock and awe that we had envisaged." He argued that "this air campaign appears to come out of a book by strategic-air-power advocates, who have argued that you start at the center and work your way out to disrupt and destroy whatever." In his view, the coalition should have worked at once to "take away [Saddam's] ability to run the country and the ability to fight. . . . The argument is that may cause a sufficient amount of 'shock and awe' it [sic] will force them to surrender. . . . As we theoretically envisaged it, we would have gone straight after the Republican Guard and its leadership and not just with precision-guided weapons." Ullman ignores the fact that the destruction of more targets in order to achieve shock and awe would have killed thousands more civilians and thereby further undermined America's political objectives. Nor is it at all clear that such further destruction would have made any difference to the Iraqi regime.

One would have thought that part of the problem was that the "shock and awe" campaign itself did not live up to its promised level of intensity, but defenders of "shock and awe" dismiss that notion. Fox News military analyst Lieutenant General Thomas McInerny (USAF, Ret.) claimed that although the attack fell short of the 3,000 precision-guided bombs dropped in the first 24 hours that the administration had promised, that exaggeration had been good: "We wanted that [3,000-PGM number] out there. . . .



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That number has an intimidating effect. There was a little tactical [sic] deception." This line of argument is fully consistent with the principles outlined in *Shock and Awe* itself:

> Psychological dominance means the ability to destroy, defeat, and neuter the will of an adversary to resist; or convince the adversary to accept our terms and aims short of using force. The target is the adversary's will, perception, and understanding. . . . Clearly, deception, confusion, misinformation, and disinformation, perhaps in massive amounts, must be employed.

In the case of Iraq, this approach clearly failed. Saddam Hussein was not cowed by the threat of war with the U.S., despite his knowledge that his armed forces could not stand up to those of the coalition. The threat of the "shock and awe" campaign, even thus exaggerated, also failed to bring him to his knees. The implementation of that campaign, finally, did not convince him to abandon his increasingly tenuous hold on power. He never surrendered. At the time of this writing, months after the end of active resistance, Saddam's location remains unknown. Whatever the abilities of shock and awe in the future, Iraqi Freedom clearly demonstrated not its triumph but its current limitations.

The reasons given for the restriction of the target lists and the limitations on the intensity of the air attack are equally instructive. Senior Air Force officials noted that, on the one hand, some targets were too politically sensitive to hit, at least in the first round: "They defend the decision to put some dual-use targets off-limits. They say this is a war about liberation and the lives of average Iraqi citizens, and that the task of postwar reconstruction must be considered," the *Washington Times* article reported. These points are valid and important, and they also vitiate some of the critical assumptions of "shock and awe." It was not the goal of the U.S. to destroy Iraq's ability to continue to function as a country or a society — only to drive Saddam from power. In that context, the "shock and awe" goal of "shutting down the country" was completely inappropriate, and the Air Force, wisely, did not try to accomplish it. Since that goal has also been accepted as the goal of NCW, this consideration brings the contradiction between the methods proposed and the ends desired into sharp relief.

On the other hand, Air Force officials say that they did not destroy Saddam's communications and even television broadcasting capabilities completely for an entirely different reason — doing so would have deprived them of the ability to obtain the critical intelligence necessary to continue the campaign: "Military sources say there are valid reasons for leaving some structures alone, but acknowledge that doing so reduces the shock effect," according to the *Washington Times* article. "For example, Baghdad's state-run TV gives the Bush administration an idea of who is in charge and who might be dead. Leaving the telecommunications network up allows the National Security Agency to eavesdrop on leadership conversations." It is an



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inherent problem with an approach based on near-perfect intelligence derived from electronic measures that the more one destroys the enemy's ability to communicate, the less one can know "nearly perfectly" about his intentions and actions. So much for "predictive battlespace awareness."

The failure of "shock and awe" to bring Saddam to heel is not surprising, at least to those skeptical of the assumptions that underlie the concept. It was more surprising that our airpower was not even able to prevent the Iraqi ground forces from maneuvering on occasion into the immediate vicinity of our own ground forces. On March 26, elements of the Republican Guard mounted a daring armored raid south from Baghdad under cover of a sandstorm. Although our airpower severely damaged the raiding forces and significantly reduced their combat power, the raiders nevertheless made contact with the lead elements of the Third Infantry Division — which promptly destroyed them. Given all of the promises involved in near-perfect intelligence and the ability to hit any target anywhere any time, it is hard to understand how the supposedly helpless Iraqis managed to move a large armored force close enough to make contact with our advanced guard.

*The failure of "shock and awe" is not surprising, at least to those skeptical of the assumptions that underlie the concept.*

Above all, however, the air campaign did not succeed in removing the regime. Saddam's agents throughout the country kept order and prevented pro-coalition demonstrations even in territory, like Basra, which the coalition nominally controlled. When coalition forces had effectively surrounded Baghdad while the air campaign against the city continued mercilessly, the regime did not crumble. It fell only when our tanks drove into Saddam's capital, thus visibly demonstrating to the world that Saddam no longer controlled his country.

As a result of this fact, a considerable number of observers have asked whether that war did not emphasize the importance of the defensive survivability characteristics of the M1 tank. Cebrowski does not think so: "Despite the strong showing of the M1 tank in Operation 'Iraqi Freedom'," reported *Jane's Defense Weekly* in May, Cebrowski said that "he tends to 'come down more on the speed and information side' over the value of armour in protecting a force in combat." He explained, "I look at these marvellous navy and air force munitions and what they do to armour. I look at what one of our own tank rounds does to everyone else's armour in the world. The notion that steel protects just does not seem to be there because it does not protect in the absolute."

It is worth briefly considering the record of the M1's performance in Iraq and the role the heavy armored forces played in that victory. The Iraqis, like most of the other enemies the U.S. can expect to face in the near and even



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not-so-near future, did not try to launch any air- or sea-based munitions against American forces. That was because they could not get any aircraft into the skies, nor could any of their ships have survived against our naval superiority long enough to get off rounds at land targets. If the Iraqis had been able to contest American control over the air and sea, moreover, critical assumptions that underlie both NCW and "shock and awe" would have collapsed and the fate of U.S. armored forces would have been, in many respects, only a small part of an enormous crisis. The notion that the potential power of enemy naval and air munitions makes defending U.S. vehicles with armor impossible is highly questionable.

Several M1s were lost, nevertheless, to enemy fire. None were killed by Iraqi tank main guns. At least two were disabled when the Iraqis used large-caliber, rapid-firing anti-aircraft guns to shoot through the "grill doors" of the engine compartments and damage the engines. One of those tanks was subsequently hit with a mortar round that set off its own ammunition in a massive explosion. The tank was, of course, destroyed. The crew, however, survived *unharmed* — including the driver, who was in the vehicle when its ammunition exploded. It is possible to kill an M1, but it is extremely difficult, and the tank's ability to protect its crew even when totally destroyed is astonishing. This is a weapons system whose crew does not need to fear having less than perfect intelligence about the enemy.

*This method of "urban warfare" flew in the face of received wisdom about how to fight in cities.*

The effective invulnerability of the M1 against the Iraqis played a critical role in the rapid, decisive victory that was Iraqi Freedom. On April 5, 2003, tanks, Bradleys, and other vehicles of the Third Infantry Division drove into the heart of Baghdad and back out again. On April 7, they raced into the center of the city and stayed. The Third did not have to wait either until it had perfect intelligence about what was going on in the city or until most of the enemy weapon's systems had been identified by UAVs and robots and destroyed with precision weapons. Relying on its superior armor protection, it raced into the city before the "situation" had been fully "developed." The Iraqi regime collapsed suddenly and spectacularly. The attacks on Mosul, Tikrit, and elsewhere encountered much less resistance than had been expected.

This method of "urban warfare" flew in the face of all of the received wisdom about how to fight in cities. For more than a decade the U.S. armed forces have been telling themselves and the world that urban warfare is hard, manpower intensive, slow, and likely to cause high casualties. Many have argued that urban warfare is a light infantry fight for which there is little room for armor. No one believed that taking Baghdad would be rapid or easy.



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It is inappropriate to generalize about urban warfare from this one experience. The Iraqi Army was weak to begin with and severely degraded at the time of the strike, as was the senior civilian and military leadership of the country. It is quite possible that another enemy would have made the sort of "thunder run" that the Third Infantry Division conducted impossibly costly. The fact remains, however, that the effective invulnerability of the M1 tank made possible a rapid and decisive conclusion to the war. In the days preceding that armored raid, analysts were still discussing a siege of Baghdad or its methodical reduction.

There can be no doubt that the war would have dragged on for days, possibly weeks longer if the U.S. had not had forces with the survival characteristics of the M1 (consider how long Milosevic stood up under the bombings of Operation Allied Force). The fastest and most bloodless approach to ending a conflict rapidly and decisively combines airpower capabilities of the sort NCW advocates with an effective and invulnerable ground force.

Transformation proponents are correct when they warn that the M1 will not continue to be survivable forever. There are already systems available in the leading militaries of the world that can kill it directly — and the Saudis and Egyptians both have large fleets of M1s themselves. It is equally clear, however, that the U.S. cannot afford to do away with the capabilities the M1 provides without sacrificing the ability to finish the enemy quickly and then transition rapidly to effective peacekeeping and nation-building. The logical conclusion is that the transformation agenda must be redirected. Instead of relying on "predictive battlespace awareness" and devoting all of the available resources to stand-off weapons systems, the military should prioritize efforts to develop vehicles and systems that can reliably protect themselves and their crews passively without destroying the enemy. The ability simply to sit on some spot and hold it without killing anyone is one of the most important aspects of the Army's contribution to war, and it is critical to peacekeeping. The preservation of that capability must be a central part of any rational transformation program. Such a change in the program seems unlikely, however, as long as the current trends within the Pentagon remain strong.

## Long-distance grand strategy

THE NOTION THAT the U.S. should "be able to run a conflict without ever leaving the United States" is deeply embedded in the plans and programs of the Bush administration. Rumsfeld has been trying for more than a year to reduce the size of the active-duty Army and the reserves by 20 percent in order to pay for his vision of transformation. He has also supported a series of proposals that would pull American forces out of their European bases and Korea. The basic justification for these proposals is that our long-range precision weapons make such forward basing



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unnecessary. Defense Department officials recently argued, in fact, that simply letting the North Koreans know that we have the capability to target their leadership in the first strike of a conflict might be enough to deter them — and might make a significant American presence in South Korea superfluous.

Just as the ideas about war that current transformation programs embrace neglect the problem of moving from military victory to the attainment of political objectives, so these proposals to slash overseas presence neglect the political aspects of those deployments. American forces, especially ground forces, deployed overseas represent a strong statement of U.S. commitment to a region. They give the United States a powerful voice in regional developments and help America to set the terms of political discussions in regions of vital interest. They also, of course, facilitate the rapid deployment of force to potential theaters of war — Europe is, as the Army likes to say, "an ocean closer" to the Middle East than the U.S. is. The United States must consider carefully the political consequences of being seen to pull back from visible commitments it has sustained, in many cases, for more than half a century.

*At its current strength, the Army cannot maintain a force of this size in Iraq for more than a year.*

Everyone knows that the U.S. can, in principle, defend any of its allies from attack. The presence of American forces overseas has nothing to do with that. The question is: Will the U.S. honor its agreements? The presence of American forces in the theater of operations has made it much easier for American leaders to persuade fearful allies that they would be defended. The withdrawal of those forces could send the opposite message just as clearly.

The proposed cuts in the size of the Army may send the same message even more powerfully. The U.S. Army now has 10 active divisions, two armored cavalry regiments (the equivalent of a brigade, one-third of a division), and one separate airborne brigade. Keeping one unit in a peacekeeping or nation-building operation for a long period of time (more than six months or so) requires the commitment of three units: one actually conducting the mission, one recovering from it, and one training for it. The U.S. currently has more than four divisions (approximately 15 brigades) in Iraq restoring order. At its current strength, the Army cannot maintain a force of this size in Iraq for more than a year. In addition, the Army now maintains more than a brigade in Afghanistan and another in the Balkans. In order simply to sustain the *current* peacekeeping and nation-building requirements the Bush administration has undertaken — in other words, with no ability to conduct any sort of operations elsewhere *at all* — the Army would need to have more than 14 active divisions instead of the current 10.



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The Defense Department projected in June that it would be possible in a matter of a few months to begin reducing the commitment to Iraq down to two divisions or even one. This prediction seems highly optimistic given the current state of the country. Yet keeping only one division in Iraq for a substantial period of time and maintaining current operations in Afghanistan and the Balkans would require the permanent commitment of five divisions — half the active-duty Army. If the Army's strength falls to eight divisions, remaining forces will be insufficient to deal with any but the smallest unexpected contingencies. We will be unable again to fight a war as politically successful even as Iraqi Freedom.

## Back to Clausewitz

If the U.S. is to undertake wars that aim at regime change and maintain its current critical role in controlling and directing world affairs, then it must fundamentally change its views of war. It is not enough to consider simply how to pound the enemy into submission with stand-off forces. War plans must also consider how to make the transition from that defeated government to a new one. A doctrine based on the notion that superpowers don't do windows will fail in this task. Regime change is inextricably intertwined with nation-building and peacekeeping. Those elements must be factored into any such plan from the outset.

It is a fundamental mistake to see the enemy as a set of targets. The enemy in war is a group of people. Some of them will have to be killed. Others will have to be captured or driven into hiding. The overwhelming majority, however, have to be persuaded. They must be persuaded not merely of the shocking awfulness of American power, but of the desirability of pursuing the policies the U.S. wishes them to pursue. And they must not be driven away from the pursuit of those policies by the horrors and opportunities presented by a chaotic, lawless vacuum created by our precision weapons. To effect regime change, U.S. forces must be positively in control of the enemy's territory and population as rapidly and continuously as possible. That control cannot be achieved by machines, still less by bombs. Only human beings interacting with other human beings can achieve it. The only hope for future success in the extension of politics that is war is to restore the human element to the transformation equation.



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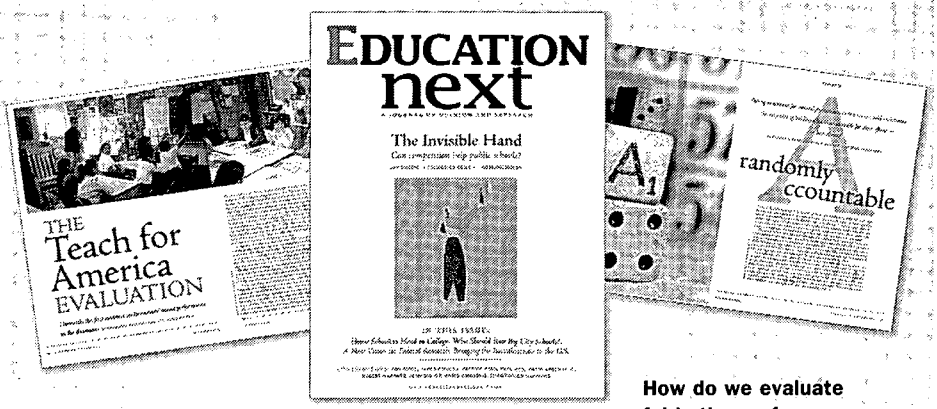


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# The Liberal Spirit In America

*By* PETER BERKOWITZ

## I. Our liberalism

NEVER HAS A people enjoyed a greater range of individual rights, or been more jealous of their freedoms, or been more convinced that the liberty they prize is good not only for themselves but also for other peoples than we in the United States today. The freest society in most respects that the world has ever seen has produced the world's most diverse society; the world's best army; the world's most organized, industrious, and productive economy; and a political order that to a remarkable degree contains the factions and divisions that have prevented so many other countries from innovating and solving collective problems. This represents the triumph in America of liberalism, a tradition of thought and politics stretching back at least to seventeenth-century England, whose fundamental moral premise is the natural freedom and equality of all and whose govern-

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ing theme has been the securing of equal freedom in political life.

Yet cause for anxiety comes from many quarters. Freedom in America has produced or permitted massive income inequalities. It has given rise to a popular culture that frequently descends into the cheap and salacious. It maintains a public school system that fails to teach many students the basics of reading and writing and arithmetic; and at higher levels of education, it breeds an academic culture that preaches the relativity of values and that cannot reach agreement on what a well-educated person ought to have learned by the time he or she graduates from college. It has contributed to a destabilizing erosion of the old rules, written and unwritten, that govern dating, sex, love, marriage, and family. It has fostered among opinion makers and intellectual elites a distrust that borders on contempt for religious belief. And it has fortified among the highly educated an uncritical faith in the coincidence of scientific progress and moral progress.

*It was not foreordained that "liberal" would become synonymous with progressive politics.*

To understand the challenge whole, it is first necessary to correct an unfortunate confusion of terms. In the United States, "liberal" commonly denotes the left wing of the Democratic Party. To be sure, as a result of bruising post-1960s political battles, many on the left have disavowed the term liberal, choosing instead the label "progressive," in fact a more apt designation for their outlook. Nevertheless, the term liberal retains a distinctive meaning, indeed a progressive one, in our political lexicon.

It was not foreordained that "liberal" would become synonymous with progressive politics as it has in the United States. Witness the career of the term in Europe, where it has come to designate something much closer to libertarianism. Yet neither is the equation of liberalism with progressivism an accident, for there is a powerful progressive thrust inhering in the liberal tradition. When it arose in the seventeenth century, before it acquired its name, liberalism, particularly that of Locke, sought to limit the claims of religious authorities in politics and the claims of political authorities in religious matters. As these ideas took root, as religion receded from the center of politics (and as science and industry developed and markets spread), individual freedom acquired more space, more individuals began to enjoy its blessings, and power shifted to those who had long been denied it. When it came into its own in the nineteenth century, liberalism, particularly that of Mill, sought to limit the role in politics of status, wealth, and sex by assuring through the state formal equality. The result was to accelerate the pace at which power shifted to the people and to spread the blessings of freedom more equally. And when, in the United States in the last third of the twentieth century, it became synonymous with the left wing of the Democratic Party, liberalism aggressively



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sought to limit the role in politics of poverty, race, sex, old age, illness, and disability by guaranteeing to all individuals a certain minimum level of material goods and moral standing. As this outlook merged in the United States with the conventional wisdom, the press for freedom became indistinguishable in many minds from the improvement of social life through the push for equality in all ways and in all realms.

Yet there is more to the defense of freedom than progress in equality, as John Stuart Mill stressed in *On Liberty* (1859) and in *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861). Because moving ahead requires holding some things still, because freedoms won must be preserved, and because its improvement as well as its preservation depends upon citizens with particular skills, knowledge, and qualities of mind and character, a free society always requires a party of order as well as a party of progress. Hence, conservatives, who take a special interest in freedom's limits and its material and moral preconditions, are properly seen as belonging to the liberal tradition and in fact play an essential role in maintaining the liberal state. Generally speaking, where the right in American politics today differs with the left is not about the primacy of personal freedom but about the primacy of competing policies; that is, the care for which goods — those related to order or those related to progress — freedom most urgently requires.

And the difference over competing policies stems from a more fundamental disagreement between left and right about the primacy of the factors that menace freedom. Progressive liberals see inequality as the chief menace to freedom and government as an essential part of the solution. For libertarian liberals, who like progressives think that freedom yields progress and like conservatives stress that freedom depends on limits, it is government that is the chief menace to freedom, and the restraint of government is freedom's essential safeguard. And for conservative liberals, both of the traditional and neoconservative variety, it is the excess of freedom and equality that poses the biggest threat to freedom, and government is seen as both friend and foe in the battle to limit freedom and equality on behalf of freedom and equality.

To maintain that liberalism constitutes our dominant moral and political tradition is not to deny the presence in America of competing traditions. Biblical faith, for example, remains a powerful force in the lives of many Americans. And even for the larger numbers who no longer organize their lives around sacred scripture and worship, biblical faith, through the impact it has had over the centuries on our moral concepts and categories, influences the scope and direction of our imagination and informs practical judgments, often in ways that rein in freedom's most ambitious and reckless claims. Morever, anger, pride, envy, ambition, honor, love, and a host of other passions that dwell within us are inflected by, but resist reduction to, our love of freedom.

Nor is arguing that many of today's progressives and conservatives are equally members of the liberal tradition and pillars of the liberal state to imply that if everybody were to sit down together, talk things over civilly,



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and sort through the issues reasonably, we would discover universal agreement on all the important questions. This is a popular conceit among professors, who can't bear the thought that the problems of politics are not amenable to conclusive resolution through rigorous reasoning (by them) and rational discourse (under their direction). Yet the lesson that emerges from an examination of the liberalism that we share suggests that the professors who dream of disinterested deliberations and ideal speech situations grounded in self-evident premises, governed by objective and necessary rules, and issuing in unassailable public policy choices have drawn exactly the wrong conclusion.

To be sure, agreement on basic liberal political institutions is as broad as is agreement on liberalism's fundamental moral premise: the natural freedom and equality of all. Who opposes representative institutions, separated powers, an independent judiciary, a free press, and legal guarantees of freedom of belief, speech, and association? However, the very scope of agreement among partisans about the lineaments of self-government brings home the permanence of disagreement in the politics of a free people. Theory teaches both that a balance must be struck between the claims of order and the claims of progress and that theory itself cannot specify the proper balance that we, in our peculiar circumstances, must strike. This is partly because theory does not determine the weight to be given to the competing goods that the party of order and the party of balance promote. It is also because that job falls to flesh-and-blood individuals, given to self-seeking and ambition. Nor can theory, once the balance has been struck, replace the need for such individuals to find ways to cooperate in maintaining it.

*A liberal spirit conduces to the task of maintaining free institutions.*

A liberal spirit conduces to the task of maintaining free institutions. Such a spirit is tolerant of opposing opinions and choices, which means that it is prepared to respect the rights of individuals with whom it disagrees and of whose conduct it disapproves. It is generous, both in seeking to understand what is true in other people's beliefs and in looking for the shared humanity in their diverse and indeed divergent strivings. And it is capable of restraining immediate desire in the interest of satisfying higher or more comprehensive desires. The exercise of these virtues enables citizens to ease the friction, take advantage of the opportunities, and handle the responsibilities that arise, amidst the frenetic motion, in a free society.

Where do the virtues that compose such a spirit come from? Will free societies always have such a spirit in sufficient supply? Thinkers on the left, particularly those influenced by Kant, such as John Rawls and Judith Shklar, have argued that free societies are in a sense self-sustaining: The experience of living under free institutions fosters in citizens a liberal character.



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Thinkers on the right, especially those who take their bearings from Tocqueville and Aristotle, such as Gertrude Himmelfarb and Harvey Mansfield, warn that free societies contain the seeds of their own destruction: The experience of freedom leads to a voracious desire for more of it, steadily severing individuals' attachment to family and faith, which they contend are the most reliable sources of the liberal spirit's virtues.

In fact, when properly formulated, these two opinions reflecting the optimism of the left and the pessimism of the right should be seen as opposite sides of the same coin. Free institutions do tend to teach toleration, generosity in the understanding of others, and self-restraint in the short term for the sake of long-term self-interest. But undisciplined and unbalanced by other principles, freedom causes toleration to metamorphose into rigid and unconvincing neutrality between competing goods. It transforms generosity in the understanding of others into the presumptuous conviction that one has understood other people's beliefs and needs better than they have and therefore should legislate so as to bring their conduct in line with their true interests. And it opens the door to excessive focus on calculating the best means for the satisfaction of desire, which soon crowds out calculations about the satisfactions found in fulfilling one's duty and eventually renders invisible the claims of duty that transcend calculation.

Why does the liberal spirit overreach? In part because to overreach is human. In part because of the common belief that freedom is made more secure by acquiring more of it. In part because the enjoyment of freedom pushes against and wears down not just the claims of this or that authority but the claims of all authority, save for that of the freely choosing individual. This is not to say that we are at the mercy of freedom's overreaching. In a free society, freedom creates the conditions under which we can bring our passion for freedom under control and discipline it to serve our purposes. Such an undertaking depends upon the awareness that our liberalism never fully embraces or exhausts our humanity. It also depends upon emancipating our understanding of the liberal tradition from a variety of misconceptions with which it has become encrusted and then grasping the temptations to which the liberal spirit is perennially prey. Such an examination is a preliminary to crafting policies, consistent with the principles of a free society, that will safeguard the best interests of the liberal spirit — but especially in the current clamor and confusion, an indispensable preliminary.

## II. Misconceiving liberalism

In our day professors, largely representing the progressive wing of the liberal tradition, have taken the lead in promulgating the misconceptions that encrust the liberal tradition. They betray a determination to obscure or simplify into nonexistence the tensions that flow from liberalism's fundamental premise, the natural freedom and equality of all.



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Although they sense the complexity, they prefer to devise stratagems to evade the conflicting principles and goods that constitute the liberalism of our moral and political life. Their evasions, however, may prove costly, since the principles and goods that support freedom do not balance themselves and will not be balanced wisely by us if we are lulled into disregarding the many and varied conflicts among them.

To move beyond the common simplifications, it is necessary to rejuvenate distinctions that the professors have sought to collapse and reconstruct the working relations between rival principles and goods that they conceive of in terms of harsh antitheses. First, liberalism is not, as is often asserted, the same as democracy. Many scholars, however, wish to collapse the distinction between the two by incorporating into the idea of democracy standards of freedom, efficiency, fairness, security — indeed of all good things. They would make the term "liberal democracy" a redundancy. It is, however, not a matter of semantics to insist that liberalism adds something important to liberal democracy, awareness of which is diminished by dropping "liberal" from the name. That added something important is the primacy of freedom, and that diminished awareness is of the ever-present potential for, and common reality of, conflict between popular will and individual rights. Scholars who fold their liberalism into their democracy are in the practice of maintaining that their progressive policy preferences are necessary to the full flowering of individual freedom and *therefore* are an expression of popular will, even though majorities to support the policies are nowhere to be found. Call this the Rousseauean fallacy.

*In contrast to liberalism, which puts freedom first, democracy puts equality first.*

In fact liberalism and democracy stand for competing, if related, principles. In contrast to liberalism, which puts freedom first, democracy puts equality first. Whereas liberalism is a doctrine about the limits that government must respect to ensure freedom, democracy is a theory that proclaims that the people, with no particular limits, should rule.

It is true that liberalism and democracy are linked by a critical affinity: Liberalism tends to think of freedom in terms of rights that are shared equally by all, while democracy tends to conceive of equality in terms of freedom to live as one pleases. It is also true that the experience of the past 250 years strongly suggests that freedom is best protected democratically and that self-government is more just when constrained by liberal guarantees of individual freedom. But the individual rights of the liberal tradition impose a defining limitation on the people's or popular will, proclaiming as a matter of fundamental law that there are some policies and programs that majorities, however strongly they may feel and however convinced they may be, are barred from enacting. Precisely where those limits fall must properly remain



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a permanent bone of contention, to be hashed out again and again as circumstances for which the law has responsibility change, but both the permanence and the propriety of the debate are obscured by equating liberalism and democracy.

Second, liberalism does not deny the claims of community. Nevertheless, an array of scholars has written as if freedom and community — or, more broadly, freedom and association — are thoroughly antagonistic and irreconcilable. On the one side, in the name of liberalism, scholars argue that individuals are constituted by their capacity for free rational choice and that community represents an external source of authority to which the individual's reason forbids him to submit. On the other side, in the name of communitarianism or civic republicanism — schools of academic political theory that arose specifically to challenge liberalism — other scholars maintain that the free and rationally choosing agent is a fantasy, because all individuals are constituted by duties and attachments that are given and not chosen, and that freedom is achieved not through the private choices that individuals make about how to conduct their lives but through the choices that citizens make in public with their fellow citizens about government and public policy. Both sides colludé in fortifying a false dichotomy between individual freedom and association. The collusion serves the interests of the liberal theorists who wish to establish freedom as not merely the supreme good for politics but the sole good and the communitarian and civic republican theorists who wish to establish a similar monopoly for their favored good.

*Putting individual freedom first is not the same as proclaiming freedom the sole and self-sufficient good.*

The interests of the liberal spirit, however, are better served by understanding that there is a genuine tension between the claims of freedom and those of community and association, but not one so thoroughgoing as to preclude a politics that gives substantial recognition to the claims of both. Recognizing that we are partly constituted by attachments we do not choose and duties we do not make is not to concede that individuals are incapable of questioning these attachments and duties and rejecting them or placing them on a different, more considered, footing. Nor is it to deny that political deliberation is a good — indeed, that choosing with fellow citizens public policy and the laws of the land is one aspect of individual freedom. Putting individual freedom first is not the same as proclaiming freedom the sole and self-sufficient good, in politics or beyond. Indeed, freedom and community or association can be mutually supportive. For example, the capacity for freedom, the makers of modern liberalism teach, is acquired in association. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1689), John Locke gives an intricate account of the role that education



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plays in inculcating the moral and intellectual virtues that equip individuals for a life of liberty; and in Locke's view, it is parents, within the confines of the fundamental association of the family, who have the responsibility to ensure that children receive this education. Throughout his writings, John Stuart Mill contends that flourishing voluntary associations where men and women meet and learn to cooperate for mutual advantage render individuals more independent and liberty more secure. Even John Rawls, in the neglected third part of his masterwork, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, 1971), argues at length that the family and the voluntary associations of civil society instill qualities of mind and character presupposed by a well-ordered liberal society.

*Liberalism was born in the revolt against the authority of the church and Aristotle.*

Third, liberalism does not reject virtue. Paralleling, however, the common arguments that seek to drive a wedge between liberalism and community, many scholars, both in the defense of liberalism and in the attack on it, still insist that the liberal tradition has little patience or place for virtue and that virtue has little patience or place for individual freedom. After all, liberalism was born in the revolt against the authority of the church and Aristotle, and the virtues were thought to revolve around the church's doctrine concerning human salvation and Aristotle's account of human excellence. So mustn't those who embrace individual freedom reject virtue, and mustn't those who cling to the virtues reject a form of political life that rejected the authorities on which they believe the moral life to be based?

Something similar to what was said about the tension between freedom and community should be said about the tension between freedom and virtue: It is genuine, but rightly understood, and what it reflects is a complicated relationship, not an insuperable opposition. As I have suggested, the liberal spirit embodies specific virtues, and the liberal tradition elaborates a compelling account of the virtues on which a free society depends. Moreover, in rejecting the political authority of religious faith and of Aristotle (and of other so-called perfectionist conceptions of man), one need not reject their truth. For, to understate matters considerably, not every respectable understanding of church doctrine requires that the church promote salvation through politics. And, again to understate matters considerably, not every respectable account of Aristotle or of perfectionist ethics in general requires that the state inculcate the ethics that truly perfects man. The liberal constraints on legislation by the state of particular conceptions of human salvation or human perfection are even compatible with the conclusion that some virtues on which the liberal state depends are better grasped by religious faith or the Aristotelian tradition of ethics.

Fourth, and closely connected, liberalism is not based on skepticism. This



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claim is often put forward proudly by academic liberals and advanced contemptuously by their critics. Academic liberals think that being grounded in skepticism about the human good is good for liberalism because it frees it from dependence on controversial opinions about human nature and the content of a truly good life. A foundation in skepticism provides liberalism, they suggest, a built-in safeguard against attempts to legislate morals: If liberalism is based on skepticism, how can it possibly promote one conception of the good life over another? Critics retort that because it is grounded in skepticism, liberalism cannot begin to do justice to the full range of human emotions, passions, and moral judgments, which are often oriented toward ideas about what is right and proper and fitting for a human being.

In fact, liberalism is firmly grounded in the belief in the natural freedom and equality of all human beings. This fundamental moral premise, at once descriptive and normative, is a statement of what human beings truly are that is rich with implications for how we ought to be treated in moral and political life and in what our good consists. Whether it is demonstrable by reason, it is liberalism's most basic affirmation, its first principle, and its non-negotiable starting point. It colors all that we say and think and do. The liberal tradition takes it to be universally true, but is not committed to the view favored by some progressive liberals that its truth is everywhere at least implicitly recognized and can serve as a conclusive justification for intervening in other people's and nations' affairs. What is erroneously interpreted as the liberal tradition's fundamental skepticism is in fact the tolerant and generous stance toward opinions about alternative conceptions of the good life that grows out of liberalism's fundamental premise. If each person is free and equal, shouldn't each person's choice about what is of ultimate importance be respected? Yet how can the choice be respected if the thing chosen is not of some value, or if disagreeable choices are outlawed or subject to organized public censure? The good life, from the liberal point of view, is the freely chosen life.

*If each person is free and equal, shouldn't each person's choice about what is of ultimate importance be respected?*

Fifth, liberalism is not an obstacle to securing the rights of minorities and women. Critics are keen to point out liberalism's various compromises with oppression and discrimination in America and quick to conclude that liberalism has been the principal cause of the denial of property, power, and status to nonwhite unpropertied men. In the United States, the paradigmatic case is that of African Americans. They have had to overcome the Constitution's legal protection of slavery; the Supreme Court's pre-Civil War decision in *Dred Scott* (1857) holding that blacks were property; its post-Civil War decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) affirming the doctrine that



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states could maintain separate but equal public facilities for whites and blacks; Jim Crow laws; and today the excruciating challenge of inner-city poverty, which itself has roots in the legacy of American slavery and discrimination. Women, too, have had to struggle to attain equal rights. They lacked the right to vote until 1920, when they were granted it by the Nineteenth Amendment; throughout American history they suffered legal disabilities concerning the right to make contracts and the right to hold jobs; and public opinion conspired with law to deny them standing, access, and opportunities. Undoubtedly liberal institutions have harbored bigotry and have been enlisted in behalf of schemes of oppression; some progressives and feminists conclude that because of this history, liberalism is irredeemably tainted and must be overthrown.

*In the fight to attain equal rights, liberalism has been for minorities and women their most reliable ally.*

Yet in the fight to attain equal rights, liberalism, far from being an obstacle, has been for minorities and women their most reliable ally. Discrimination on the basis of race and sex has a history that predates the advent of liberalism, and these injustices persisted in the United States long after the rise of liberalism despite, not because of, liberal principles. Indeed, at every step of the way in the battle to overcome legally enforced discrimination, minorities, women, and their friends have enjoyed their greatest successes when they appealed to liberal principles. And even when opponents of discrimination have appealed to non-liberal principles or, indeed, when they have poured scorn on liberalism — as in the cases of the student movement of the 1960s, postmodern theorists, and radical feminists — their appeal could gain a respectful and sympathetic hearing because of the power that liberal principles exercise in the consciences of most citizens.

Sixth, liberalism does not falsely promise to remain neutral among competing conceptions of the good life. This canard has its origins in the misguided effort by academic liberals, which had its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s but is still going strong in many precincts, to show that maintaining neutrality toward different ways of life lay at the very heart of liberalism. On behalf of this claim, they devised elaborate thought experiments designed to show how state neutrality is possible — and why it is necessary for the state to aggressively redistribute goods (Rawls) or, to the contrary, why it is mandatory for the state to scrupulously avoid redistribution in order to honor neutrality (Robert Nozick, for example). Their critics delighted in demonstrating that every such thought experiment, no matter how ingenious, presupposed the good of autonomy, or a life organized around the principle that individuals should live in accordance with ends that they have chosen for themselves. In other words, contended the critics, neutrality was



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valued by academic liberals as the primary principle for government because it served the interests of the autonomous life.

The debate about liberalism's neutrality, however, has been ill-conceived and has come to a dead end. The critics are right about the bias that inheres in the doctrine of neutrality, but they are wrong to think that liberalism is somehow at fault for not coming clean or for breaking its promise. This is because the doctrine of neutrality is the invention of Anglo-American post-60s academic liberalism. The larger liberal tradition makes no such representations or promises. It sees the determination to promote a single conception of human perfection or vision of religious salvation through the force of law as a major threat to freedom. It fully expects that a political society grounded in the natural freedom and equality of all will be distinguished by its openness to human diversity and by the value it places — both to the individual and to the wider society — on "experiments in life," in John Stuart Mill's phrase. While this may look like neutrality, it isn't. Individuals whose fundamental beliefs place less of a premium on individual choice, to say nothing of those who see celebration of individual choice as a revolt against God or a betrayal of the nation, will certainly be put at a disadvantage in a free society. For this, liberalism need offer no apology. While it cannot and does not require neutrality, liberal respect for individual choice does counsel toleration. Toleration calls upon individuals to live with and respect the rights of others, including the rights of those who embrace ways of life of which they disapprove so long as these individuals are willing to respect the rights of others. Laws that put toleration into practice will certainly make life harder for individuals whose way of life requires them to enshrine in public law their religious ideals or conceptions of moral perfection. This goes not only for those who put their faith in the Bible, but also for those who put their faith in autonomy.

*The liberal tradition does not suppose that all individuals are cut from the same cloth.*

Seventh, along the same lines, liberalism does not invest the state with responsibility to make individuals autonomous or give it authority to perfect citizens' powers to make rational choices about moral and political life. This has been the view advanced by so-called perfectionist liberals. They are critics of the idea of liberal neutrality, but on behalf of what they regard as the liberal state's affirmative responsibility to emancipate individuals through thoroughgoing public education from the dead weight of religion, tradition, parental authority, and the accidents of personal experience. They do not go so far as to argue that individuals must be forced to be free, but they do sometimes envisage a contest over children's souls between parents and a secular and secularizing state. Without such state intervention, argue perfectionist liberals, citizens cannot fully enjoy their liberties, or deliberate reason-



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ably about public affairs, or effectively maintain the political institutions characteristic of a free people.

The liberal tradition, however, does not suppose that all individuals are cut from the same cloth, nor does it require that state education make all individuals in the same mold. Indeed, it counsels against states that make promotion of the ideal of autonomy a goal of the state on the principled grounds that the state lacks authority or competence to promote human perfection, the liberal interpretation included. It does not follow that the state is prohibited from imposing any educational requirements on children. There are jobs to be done in a liberal state, and an educated citizenry is needed to perform them. To maintain a liberal state, however, it is not necessary that every citizen be a virtuoso of enlightenment sentiment and critical reasoning. Indeed, that way lies a state-induced conformism that imperils freedom by depriving it of competing outlooks. It is enough — it is in fact a great good — for the liberal state to secure that degree of freedom that allows individuals, with the help of others beginning with one's parents, to perfect themselves.

The misconceptions that encrust the liberal tradition do not come from nowhere. In every case they represent an effort to overlook the interplay of competing principles and goods within it. To be sure, there would be fewer sources of confusion and instability if liberalism and democracy were one and the same; if the claims of liberalism and those of community were entirely irreconcilable; if liberalism and virtue were utterly antagonistic; if liberals by definition couldn't legislate morals because their fundamental moral and political beliefs were devoid of moral content; if liberalism were the principal source of the oppression and discrimination that minorities and women have suffered on its watch; if liberalism could once and for all be applauded for its commitment to the doctrine of neutrality or condemned for its betrayal of it; if the autonomous individual were the only individual liberalism could respect. But the suppression of crucial distinctions and the promulgation of false dichotomies, often under the initiative of liberals themselves, is for contemporary liberalism a still greater source of confusion and instability.

## III. The paradox of freedom

THE SINGLE GREATEST source of instability in the liberal spirit stems from the momentum that freedom develops in a free society. Public opinion and popular culture sing its praise. Social and political institutions absorb its imperatives and give voice to its demands. Private life is permeated by it. Progress in freedom gives new meaning to the virtues that epitomize the liberal spirit: It dissolves toleration into indifference or neutrality; it dissipates generosity into busybodiness or bossiness; and it collapses rational or enlightened self-interest into petty selfishness. By placing the individual at the center, freedom also creates fertile ground for the



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growth of age-old vices, particularly narcissism, vanity, and sanctimoniousness. At every turn, the spread of freedom emboldens the liberal spirit's inclination to expose and overthrow the claims of arbitrary authority. However, as the claims of freedom themselves acquire authority in a free society, the liberal spirit finds it difficult to limit its campaign against authority to that which is arbitrary. Or rather, with each new success, the liberal spirit comes closer to viewing all authority as arbitrary. Eventually, the liberal spirit turns upon the authority of freedom itself, attacking the very source of its moral standing. Thus does postmodernism arise out of the sources of liberalism.

Freedom's momentum can be seen in the unfolding of the liberal tradition. Early on, as exemplified by Locke, the liberal spirit rebelled in particular against arbitrariness in the exercise of political authority, the authority exercised by the state over the individual. Later, in Mill's age, as liberalism attained maturity, the liberal spirit increasingly chafed at authority in the moral realm as well, targeting more directly the claims of public opinion, of clergy, and of parents to issue authoritative judgments about how others should live. In our day, as liberalism has grown both more aggressive and more complacent, the liberal spirit not only has found threats to freedom lurking everywhere, but also has demanded that the state rather than the individual take responsibility for rooting them out. The next frontier is the constraint imposed by our biology. Astounding developments in the realm of biotechnology are encouraging the liberal spirit to see natural constraints on human life as arbitrary and capable of being overcome, if that is what individuals desire, by drugs, by surgery, by gene therapy, and by genetic engineering.

*Freedom's momentum can be seen in the unfolding of the liberal tradition.*

There is reason to worry, however, that the relentless breaking down of barriers in the political realm, the moral realm, and the natural realm poses a threat to freedom by destroying the conditions for its humanly satisfying exercise. For freedom has roots in our nature, depends on the maintenance of order in our affairs, and receives its highest justification from the ends it enables us to pursue. Yet the advance of freedom tends to subvert our understanding of our natures, our respect for the imperatives of order, and our willingness to view any ends as authoritative.

Freedom's self-subverting tendencies give rise to the paradox of freedom: Freedom depends upon a variety of beliefs, practices, and institutions that are weakened by the increasingly forceful reverberations of freedom throughout all facets of moral and political life. Some more traditional conservatives will say that such weakening is the baleful and inevitable consequence of modern freedom. Some more radical progressives will contend that what the traditional conservatives regard as a baleful weakening is really a long overdue liberation. But both the traditional conservatives and the



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radical progressives see only what they want to see. Freedom's self-subverting tendencies are real but not the whole story. They are inseparable from progress in freedom and, indeed, are inseparable from freedom's self-correcting powers. The very freedom that brings traditional authorities and institutions into question creates an opportunity for a reconsideration of their function and foundation. Indeed, freedom's self-subverting tendencies are the object on which the liberal spirit's self-correcting powers — its ability to stand back, take a fresh look, discipline passions, ferret out prejudice, and assess its situation reasonably — are currently most in need of focusing.

Consider first the realm of education. Education is indispensable to preparing citizens for the rights and responsibilities of freedom. Instilling in their children a sense of good and bad, forming their principles, and generally directing their education is itself an expression of parents' freedom. But parents' freedom is also limited by their responsibility and the individual rights of children, which are enforceable by the liberal state, to ensure that their sons and daughters receive a certain basic education. Especially at the elementary level, where it is compulsory in the United States and provided by government to all and by private schools for those who wish and can afford it, basic education focuses on reading, writing, and arithmetic. As students move from grade school through junior high and high school, schools generally see their mission as increasingly including instruction in the history and ideas that form the basis of their own political society. In the United States, because of the universal principles on which it is based, this also impels schools to educate students in the history and ideas of other peoples and places. As an obligation that falls equally upon all young people, schooling helps form manners and moral sensibility, or mores. At higher levels, a liberal arts education — one that involves general study of history, literature, art, philosophy, the social sciences, and the natural sciences — enlarges the perspective, refines the moral sensibility, and deepens the understanding. This makes for more responsible individuals, capable of bringing under their control a wider range of decisions that affect the kind of life they live and the kind of person they will become.

*Education is indispensable to preparing citizens for the rights and responsibilities of freedom.*

But freedom's progress also hollows out education. First, it undermines parental authority, treating the effort by parents to pass on their way of life as an attempt to bind their children to the past. Increasingly, the liberal spirit comes to see education as itself an arbitrary authority, intruding impermissibly on the self's right to live and interpret the world as it sees fit. Educators respond by adopting a progressive thrust for schools. No longer will schools teach truths; instead, they will prepare students to decide for themselves



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what is true despite the fact that basic literacy and general knowledge of the world are preconditions for evaluating rival truth claims. Eventually, this leads to an approach to education that centers around providing a forum in which students are invited to make and express their own truths. The result is the very opposite of the original understanding of a liberal arts education, for an educational system devoted to making each student the highest authority of what is true for him or her locks in ignorance, shelters inherited ways of viewing the world, and, by signaling that what has been written and thought in the past could not compare in significance to what individuals are feeling in the present, cuts students off from the history of human political and intellectual achievement.

Work, or wage labor, provides the material means in a free society by which individuals make themselves self-sustaining. Work is driven by necessity: We must put bread on the table and maintain a roof over our heads. But under the auspices of freedom it becomes a badge of honor. For most, jobs are the most sustained activity in public life: They serve as a highly visible symbol of our personal independence and as a mark of our ability to care for ourselves and to take responsibility for our lives. Work channels ambition and competitiveness into undertakings that benefit society. It fortifies such necessary virtues as discipline, industry, cooperation, and the calculation of long-term benefit. And for those fortunate to be employed in skilled labor or as professionals, mastery of craft in work provides a sense of pride and the pleasure of developing one's powers. Moreover, by operating to open the workplace to all regardless of class, race, or sex, the claims of freedom humanize the world of work.

*As work becomes more attractive and more fulfilling, it encourages the neglect of private and public affairs.*

But freedom becomes increasingly uncompromising, demanding of work that it be rewarding through and through because otherwise it might be experienced as a form of servitude. The very effort to meet this uncompromising demand threatens the functioning of other parts of a free person's life. Especially as work becomes more attractive and more fulfilling, we allow it to consume more of our time and energy. It encourages the neglect of private and public affairs. It squeezes vital realms — friendship and family, community and the arts, charitable work and politics — into smaller and smaller compartments. Moreover, since, however attractive and fulfilling it may become, work is still constituted by an exchange of pay for labor, the more we work, the more we tend to equate reward and worth with financial remuneration. And by opening the workplace wide to women, which it unequivocally and rightly insists upon, the ethos of freedom ensures that both sexes will every working day imbibe large doses of the code of com-



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mercial conduct and willy-nilly bring back into the home greater quantities of the cold spirit of calculation.

Romantic love, in the era of freedom, comes to occupy a commanding position in the hearts of men and women. In a world in which one authoritative good after another loses its luster, romantic love offers the hope of a taste of the transcendent in the here and now. Romantic love has roots in the powerful push and pull of sexual desire and in the abiding human longing to be loved for who one truly is. It gains in standing as freedom progresses. By releasing individuals from the obligation to marry a mate of somebody else's choosing, the obligation to remain in an unhappy marriage, or for that matter the obligation to marry at all, freedom provides the opportunity to search the world so long as one has breath for one's one true love.

*Family offers a fixed point amidst the turbulence and uncertainty of a free society.*

But freedom also undermines romantic love by imparting lessons of impermanence and by establishing systems of separateness. Aided by the invention of the birth control pill, which for the first time in human history cheaply and effectively separates sex from reproduction, freedom teaches us to postpone permanent relations: Before you can know that you have found your one true love, women as well as men must experiment vigorously. Otherwise, how will you know what you have missed or be sure of what you have found? Yet the dream of one true love depends upon the idea of exclusiveness, and how can what is widely shared also be exclusive? Moreover, the more we pile up experiences in dating and mating, the more we build up systems of separateness in which we learn to think of ourselves as independent agents capable of entering and exiting relationships at will — and the more we cultivate exactly the opposite of the orientation of the heart in love, which longs for forever. Having raised the stakes for romantic love, freedom also undercuts the conditions for its attainment.

Family offers a fixed point amidst the turbulence and uncertainty of a free society. It serves as a "haven in a heartless world." Where public life puts one endlessly to the test of merit, the family gives to its members unconditional acceptance and love based not on what one has achieved but on who one is. It permits the domestication and maturing of romantic love. It is the fundamental social unit where children first learn to love and be loved, receive protection during the long period in which they are unable to care for themselves, and acquire the emotional, social, moral, and intellectual training necessary to eventually take responsibility for themselves as fully functioning adults.

But freedom also unravels the fabric of family. It loosens the ties among family members and across generations by conditioning the individual to see



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his essential responsibility as to himself. It suggests to men and women that they should put their work or their pleasure ahead of duties owed to the family, in part by reducing those duties to calculations about benefits, in part by instilling a preference for going it alone. It induces parents to regard children as investments, the caring for whom must be weighed against the time and energy taken from work and leisure. As marriage is delayed so that individuals can find themselves before committing, and as family commitments are squeezed to conform to the professional aspirations of both parents, family size falls, depriving children of the education that comes from sibling solidarity as well as sibling rivalry. At the same time, the standard internal structure of the family — one mother and one father — increasingly comes to be viewed as itself a matter of private choice, paving the way for the normalization of families consisting of one parent or two mothers or two fathers or other combinations growing out of the routinization of divorce and the increasing comfort with diverse sexual preferences. As mobility separates grandparents from grandchildren, more elderly people are deprived of the joy of children, and more children are deprived of grandparents' love.

*It is one thing to submit to God, another to submit to those who purport to interpret His will or law.*

Biblical faith lends support to the idea, central to the era of freedom, that each individual is of special significance. One does not have to believe that liberalism represents a secular and political interpretation of biblical faith to appreciate that the moral premise of natural freedom and equality of all is fortified by a religion that proclaims that all men and all women are created in God's image and are holy because He is holy. Moreover, communities of worship constituted by biblical faith provide a source of that individual discipline and self-restraint that enables free individuals to govern their love of freedom and live well together. And such communities offer a choreography of life in which the routine of everyday is endowed with larger significance, individuals give and take solace, and life's cycles and turning points are honored.

But freedom also puts faith on the defensive. God's will or law is primarily known through tradition and the imperfect human beings who must preserve and transmit it. But of all forms of dependence, dependence on the will of other human beings sits most uneasily with the liberal spirit. It is one thing to submit to God, another to submit to those who purport to interpret His will or law, especially in a world that daily furnishes rival and incompatible accounts of ultimate matters. Emboldened by freedom, individuals endowed with the liberal spirit seek to go beyond practicing the faith of their choice to creating rituals and observances that better reflect their own distinctive sensibility and understanding. However, as religion loses its ground in anything outside the individual's imagination, it loses the authority to dis-



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cipline the soul and set boundaries for conduct. Some see this as progress and go further by trying to make a religion out of choice or, to use a popular term for the radicalization of choice, self-creation. This sanctification of individual will comes close to what traditional religion warned against as the temptation of idolatry.

Modern science serves freedom by greatly expanding human powers. It enables us to draw energy from natural resources, produce and distribute vast amounts and variety of material goods, communicate at long distances, travel quickly and in comfort, cure disease and prevent illness, and in innumerable ways improve the quality of daily life. It also represents an exhilarating exercise of man's rational faculty, in which progress depends on the determination to push the outside of the envelope, to constantly advance the limits of knowledge.

But freedom accelerates to a breakneck speed the determination to surpass limits and achieve mastery over nature that is at the heart of the scientific sensibility. This puts science on a collision course with ethics, which is based on an appreciation of limits. Science teaches that no limit is deserving of respect, save perhaps the safety of individual scientists and their human subjects. But since science in its own terms cannot give an account of why even those limits are worth respecting — the natural freedom and equality of all cannot be verified experimentally — it slowly erodes respect for the individual. Scientists may be motivated in their research by a desire to produce results that benefit humanity, but the goal of benefiting humanity draws no support from the scientific point of view. Indeed, science's assumption that the world is strictly explicable in terms of cause-and-effect relations has a tendency to obscure the uniqueness of human beings and reduce us to objects for study and manipulation. Energized by freedom, science encourages individuals both to think of themselves as sovereign over all of nature and at the same time to consider themselves as subject to nature's unvarying laws, as are all other objects in the universe. But a free man is neither master nor slave.

The paradox of freedom at work in the realms of education, work, romantic love, family, faith, science, and elsewhere as well is not set in motion by some perversity or pathology that sneaks up behind and seizes upon the liberal spirit. Rather, it springs from an instability built into liberalism's fundamental moral premise. The naturally free and equal individual is a sovereign individual, since his freedom signifies that he is his own highest authority. At the same time, the naturally free and equal individual is a subject individual, since his sovereignty rests on a premise whose authority it explicitly or tacitly recognizes, which affirms the equal sovereignty of all others. Hence, a free society is composed entirely of sovereign individuals and entirely of subject individuals because each is always at the same time both. As a consequence, the liberal spirit is simultaneously radically aristocratic and radically egalitarian. This multiplicity can be extraordinarily fruitful, preparing the liberal spirit, for example, to appreciate the world's many-



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sidedness. It can also be a recipe for disaster, inclining the liberal spirit to divide sharply against itself.

# IV. Conserving liberalism

OURS IS THE era of equality in freedom. Our freedom encourages us to cast aside arbitrary authority and topple unjust hierarchy, but it also undermines the just claims of political order and moral excellence. It severs onerous bonds of association, but it also separates and isolates. It is the touchstone of our equality, yet it permits and indeed encourages competition, which results in vast disparities in wealth, power, and glory. It makes us responsible for ourselves and infuses us with a sense of the humanity and rights that we share with all people on the planet while loosening the claims of duty. It is bound up with the realization of our most cherished hopes while putting awkward pressure on and destabilizing them. It eloquently exalts choice and then falls crushingly silent concerning what actions and ends are choiceworthy, leaving it perilously close to teaching that the choice is all.

The promise and the dangers of our era are indissolubly connected. The more freedom we have, the more we want. And the more we get, the more we weaken freedom's foundations in moral and political life. However, the very same circumstances that unleash freedom's self-subverting tendencies also create opportunities for the exercise of the liberal spirit's self-correcting powers, which primarily consist of the free mind's ability to understand its interests well and devise measures to secure them.

When the free mind turns its attention to our present predicament, it may well conclude that it is in the liberal spirit's best interest to conserve something of its origin. This requires reacquainting ourselves with the liberal tradition's teachings about freedom's foundation in our nature and freedom's material and moral preconditions. In light of what we now know about freedom's history, the free mind may also conclude that it is necessary to correct something of the liberal spirit's origin, particularly the inclination or temptation, present from the beginning, to see freedom as an end in itself disconnected from the service of other human purposes, including those that are neither defined nor determined by freedom. Then, in part because to be bound to any one tradition is contrary to the liberal spirit's own imperatives, in part because it is foolish to suppose that the liberal tradition, much as we owe it, offers the last word on who we are and what we can and should become, the truly free mind is likely to seek to go beyond the liberal tradition to think more comprehensively about what freedom is good for.

Improving by conserving the liberal spirit is easier said than done. But the doing first requires the saying, and to say something useful, the challenge must be accurately understood.



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# POLICY *Review*

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# Parents or Prisons

*By* JENNIFER ROBACK MORSE

FOR SOME PEOPLE, prisons are a substitute for parents. This apparent overstatement is shorthand for two more precise points. First, without parents — two of them, married to each other, working together as a team — a child is more likely to end up in the criminal justice system at some point in his life. Without parents, prison becomes a greater probability in the child's life. Second, if a child finds himself in the criminal justice system, either in his youth or adulthood, the prison will perform the parental function of supervising and controlling that person's behavior.

Of course, prison is a pathetic substitute for genuine parents. Incarceration provides extreme, tightly controlled supervision that children typically outgrow in their toddler years and does so with none of the love and affection that characterize normal parental care of small children. But that is what is happening: The person has failed to internalize the self-command necessary for living in a reasonably free and open society at the age

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most people do. Since he cannot control himself, someone else must control him. If he becomes too much for his parents, the criminal justice system takes over.

These necessary societal interventions do not repair the loss the child has sustained by the loss of a relationship with his parents. By the time the penal system steps in, the state is engaged in damage control. A child without a conscience, a child without self-control, is a lifelong problem for the rest of society.

A free society needs people with consciences. The vast majority of people must obey the law voluntarily. If people don't conform themselves to the law, someone will either have to compel them to do so or protect the public when they do not. It costs a great deal of money to catch, convict, and incarcerate lawbreakers — not to mention that the surveillance and monitoring of potential criminals tax everybody's freedom if habitual lawbreakers comprise too large a percentage of the population.

*A child without a conscience or self-control is a lifelong problem for the rest of society.*

The basic self-control and reciprocity that a free society takes for granted do not develop automatically. Conscience development takes place in childhood. Children need to develop empathy so they will care whether they hurt someone or whether they treat others fairly. They need to develop self-control so they can follow through on these impulses and do the right thing even if it might benefit them to do otherwise.

All this development takes place inside the family. Children attach to the rest of the human race through their first relationships with their parents. They learn reciprocity, trust, and empathy from these primal relationships. Disrupting those foundational relations has a major negative impact on children as well as on the people around them. In particular, children of single parents — or completely absent parents — are more likely to commit crimes.

Without two parents, working together as a team, the child has more difficulty learning the combination of empathy, reciprocity, fairness, and self-command that people ordinarily take for granted. If the child does not learn this at home, society will have to manage his behavior in some other way. He may have to be rehabilitated, incarcerated, or otherwise restrained. In this case, prisons will substitute for parents.

The observation that there are problems for children growing up in a disrupted family may seem to be old news. Ever since Barbara Defoe Whitehead famously pronounced "Dan Quayle Was Right" (*Atlantic Monthly*, April 1993), the public has become more aware that single motherhood is not generally glamorous in the way it is sometimes portrayed on television. David Blankenhorn's *Fatherless America* (Basic Books, 1995)



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depicted a country that is fragmenting along family lines. Blankenhorn argued, and continues to argue in his work at the Institute for American Values, that the primary determinant of a person's life chances is whether he grew up in a household with his own father.

Since these seminal works, it has become increasingly clear that the choice to become a single parent is not strictly a private choice. The decision to become an unmarried mother or the decision to disrupt an existing family does not meet the economist's definition of "private." These choices regarding family structure have significant spillover effects on other people. We can no longer deny that such admittedly very personal decisions have an impact on people other than the individuals who choose.

There are two parts to my tale. The first concerns the impact of being raised in a single-parent household on the children. The second involves the impact that those children have on the rest of society.

## Current events

THE TWO PARTS of my story were juxtaposed dramatically on the local page of the *San Diego Union-Tribune* one Wednesday morning at the end of January. "Dangling Foot Was Tip-Off," explained the headline. A security guard caught two teenaged boys attempting to dump their "trash" into the dumpster of the gated community he was responsible for guarding. The guard noticed what looked like a human foot dangling out of the bag. He told the boys he wanted to see what was in it. They refused. As a private security guard, he had no authority to arrest or detain the pair. He took their license plate number and a description of the duo and called authorities.

The "trash" proved to be the dismembered body of the boys' mother. They had strangled her, chopped off her head and hands, and ultimately dumped her body in a ravine in Orange County. The boys were half-brothers. The elder was 20 years old. His father had committed suicide when the boy was an infant. The younger boy was 15. His father had abandoned their mother. As of this writing, the older boy, Jason Bautista, was being held in lieu of $1 million bail. The younger, Matthew Montejo, was being held in juvenile hall.

At first glance, the second news item seems unrelated to the first. On the same page of the newspaper, a headline read, "Mayor Wants 20% Budget Cuts." This particular mayor presides over the city of Oceanside, the same city where the brothers tried to dump their mother's body. In nearby Vista, the mayor's "State of the City Address Warns of Possible Deep Cuts." In Carlsbad, one freeway exit to the south, the city's finances were "Called Good Now, Vulnerable in Future." All these mayors were tightening their cities' belts in response to severe budget cuts proposed by California Governor Gray Davis. The governor expects to reduce virtually every budget



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category in the state budget except one: the Department of Corrections.

Therein lies the tale: These stories are connected by more than just the date and time of their reportage. The increase in serious crimes by younger and younger offenders is absorbing a greater percentage of state resources, necessarily crowding out other services. The Bautista brothers and others like them do have something to do with the budget woes of state and local governments.

Several other high-profile cases of juvenile crime fit this pattern. Alex and Derek King, aged 12 and 13 respectively, bludgeoned their sleeping father to death with a baseball bat and set fire to the house to hide the evidence. The mother of the King brothers had not lived with them for the seven years prior to the crime. Derek had been in foster care for most of those years until his behavior, including a preoccupation with fire, became too difficult for his foster parents to handle. The murder took place two months after Derek was returned to his father's custody.

John Lee Malvo, the youthful assistant in the Beltway Sniper case, came to the United States with his mother from Jamaica. His biological father has not seen him since 1998. His mother evidently had a relationship with John Allen Mohammed, who informally adopted her son. Mohammed himself, probably the mastermind if not the triggerman in the serial sniper case, was also a fatherless child. According to one of his relatives, Mohammed's mother died when he was young; his grandfather and aunt raised him because his dad was not around.

While these high-profile cases dramatize the issues at stake, excessive focus on individual cases like these can be a distraction. As more information about the Bautista family comes in, for instance, a variety of mitigating or confounding circumstances might emerge to suggest that factors other than living in a single-parent home accounted for the horrible crime. A family history of mental illness, perhaps, or maybe a history of child abuse by the mother toward the children may surface as contributing factors. And indeed, many of the most gruesome crimes are committed not by fatherless children in single-mother households, but by motherless boys, growing up in a father-only household. Some, such as John Lee Malvo, had essentially no household at all. But these confounding factors should not distract us from the overwhelming evidence linking single parents or absent parents to the propensity to commit crimes.

## The statistical evidence

THIS RESULT HAS been found in numerous studies. The National Fatherhood Initiative's *Father Facts*, edited in 2002 by Wade Horn and Tom Sylvester, is the best one-stop shopping place for this kind of evidence. Of the many studies reviewed there, a representative one was reported in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* in May 1996.



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Researchers Chris Couglin and Samuel Vuchinich found that being in step-parent or single-parent households more than doubled the risk of delinquency by age 14. Similarly, a massive 1993 analysis of the underclass by M. Anne Hill and June O'Neill, published by Baruch College's Center for the Study of Business and Government, found that the likelihood that a young male will engage in criminal activity increases substantially if he is raised without a father.

These studies, like most in this area, attempted to control for other, confounding factors that might be correlated with living in a single-parent household. If single mothers have less money than married mothers, then perhaps poverty is the fundamental problem for their children. But even taking this possibility into account, the research still shows that boys who grew up outside of intact marriages were, on average, more likely than other boys to end up in jail.

Another set of studies found that the kids who are actually in the juvenile justice system disproportionately come from disrupted families. The Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services, in a 1994 report entitled "Family Status of Delinquents in Juvenile Correctional Facilities in Wisconsin," found that only 13 percent came from families in which the biological mother and father were married to each other. By contrast, 33 percent had parents who were either divorced or separated, and 44 percent had parents who had never married. The 1987 *Survey of Youth in Custody*, published by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, found that 70 percent of youth in state reform institutions across the U.S. had grown up in single- or no-parent situations.

## Causal links

THERE ARE SEVERAL plausible links between single parenthood and criminal behavior. The internal dynamic of a one-parent household is likely to be rather different from that of a two-parent household. Two parents can supervise the child's behavior more readily than one. Misbehavior can continue undetected and uncorrected for longer periods of time until it becomes more severe and more difficult to manage.

Likewise, the lowered level of adult input partially accounts for the lowered educational attainments of children of single parents. Such families report parents spending less time supervising homework and children spending less time doing homework. Not surprisingly, kids in these families have inferior grades and drop out of school more frequently. Leaving school increases the likelihood of a young person becoming involved in criminal behavior. It is similarly no surprise that adolescents who are left home alone to supervise themselves after school find more opportunities to get into trouble. Finally, the percentage of single-parent families in a neighborhood is one of the strongest predictors of the neighborhood's crime rate. In fact,



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Wayne Osgood and Jeff Chambers, in their 2000 article in the journal *Criminology*, find that father absence is more significant than poverty in predicting the crime rate.

These kinds of factors are easy enough to understand. A more subtle connection between the fractured family and criminal behavior is the possibility that the child does not form strong human attachments during infancy. A child obviously cannot attach to an absent parent. If the one remaining parent is overwhelmed or exhausted or preoccupied, the child may not form a proper attachment even to that parent. Full-fledged attachment disorder is often found among children who have spent a substantial fraction of their infancy in institutions or in foster care. (Think of Derek King.)

*Usually, the parents win the race between the growth of the child's body and that of his conscience.*

An attachment-disordered child is the truly dangerous sociopath, the child who doesn't care what anyone thinks, who does whatever he can get away with. Mothers and babies ordinarily build their attachments by being together. When the mother responds to the baby's needs, the baby can relax into her care. The baby learns to trust. He learns that human contact is the great good that ensures his continued existence. He learns to care about other people. He comes to care where his mother is and how she responds to him. Eventually, he will care what his mother thinks of him.

This process lays the groundwork for the development of the conscience; caring what she thinks of him allows him to internalize her standards of good conduct. As he gets older, bigger, and stronger, his mother can set limits on his behavior without physically picking him up and carrying him out of trouble. Mother's raised eyebrow from across the room can be a genuine deterrent against misbehavior. As he matures, she doesn't even need to be present. He simply remembers what she wants him to do. Ultimately, he doesn't explicitly think about his parents' instructions. Without even considering punishments or approval, his internal voice reminds him, "We don't do that sort of thing." He has a conscience.

In most families, the parents win the race between the growth of the child's body and that of his conscience. By the time a child is too large and strong to muscle around, he had better have some self-command. If he doesn't, somebody will have to monitor his behavior all the time. He'll lie and steal and sneak. Punishments won't have much impact. He will become more sophisticated at calculating what he wants to try to get away with.

If the parents weren't abusive to begin with, they can become so at this point. They may keep trying to step up the penalties without realizing that the penalties aren't the point. The problem is that the child isn't listening to any inner voice of conscience. The child shouldn't even be thinking about



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the severity of penalties. The child ought to be thinking, "I am not the kind of person who even considers doing that."

## Mental illness and genetics

ONE ALTERNATIVE hypothesis is that a family history of mental illness provides the causal relationship between crime and family structure. People who have a family history of certain kinds of mental illness may also have a higher propensity to become single parents. The same mental instability that contributes to a higher propensity to commit crimes may also make it more difficult for the person to form and sustain long-term relationships such as marriage.

A number of studies examine the relationship between single parenthood and some kinds of mental and emotional problems. A Swedish study by Gunilla Ringback Weitoft, Anders Hjern, Bengt Haglund, and Mans Rosen, released in January 2003 in the British medical journal *Lancet*, considered the impact of single-parent households on adolescents. This study explicitly took account of the family's history of mental illness. The Swedish adolescent children of single-parent households were twice as likely to abuse drugs or alcohol, twice as likely to attempt suicide, and about one and a half times as likely to suffer from a psychiatric illness. Parental history of mental illness accounted for very little of the variation in these various adolescent problems.

An extensive study of British data, reported by Andrew Cherlin and colleagues in the April 1998 issue of the *American Sociological Review*, also establishes a link between living in a single-parent household and some kinds of emotional problems over the child's entire lifetime. These researchers found that having divorced parents increases the likelihood of a wide range of problems, including depression, anxiety, phobias, and obsessions, over the entire lifetime. In addition, these children are more likely to be aggressive and disobedient during childhood.

The increased likelihood of aggressive behavior is confirmed in a variety of American studies, including Michael Workman and John Beer's 1992 study in *Psychological Reports* and Nancy Vaden-Kiernan's 1995 study in the *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*. Not every instance of aggressive behavior is criminal behavior, of course, but it is fair to say that something that increases the likelihood of aggression probably raises the possibility of some kinds of crime.

## The cost of controlling people

PEOPLE WHO DO not control themselves have to be controlled by outside forces. This very costly business may, for a while, be hidden from the public eye. The family absorbs the costs. A single



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mother, for instance, may try to enlist the help of her parents or other extended family members if she has a truly out-of-control child. The family, however it is structured, rearranges itself to protect itself from the child who is disruptive, defiant, or violent. The family has to provide extremely tight supervision or else bear the brunt of the child's behavior.

If the behavior gets serious enough, the criminal justice system will be called into action. People outside the family then have to manage the child's behavior. These people might include some combination of police officers, prison guards, social workers, psychiatrists, judges, and parole officers, depending on the child's age and the seriousness of his crimes. All these people have to be paid, either by the family or by the taxpayers. When the public sector gets involved, the costs become visible to the rest of society.

*When the public sector gets involved, the costs become visible to the rest of society.*

These costs add up. In California, for instance, the corrections budget has doubled since the 1960s as a percentage of the state's budget. By 2002-03, the prison system accounted for about 6 percent of the state budget, or more than $5.2 billion, an amount greater than what the state spends on transportation. Despite the current California budget crisis forcing cutbacks in most areas, the Department of Corrections is gaining a small boost of $40 million.

Some critics have claimed that these increases are political paybacks: The California Correctional Peace Officers Association has been one of the governor's biggest campaign contributors. This charge has some plausibility, since most of the increases in the department's budget are going to personnel costs. But being a prison guard is not a particularly pleasant job, and somebody, as they say, has to do it. Many of the facilities are in remote, unattractive parts of the state where attracting workers presents a continuing challenge. For instance, the Pelican Bay maximum-security prison in the far north of California is considered, if I may use the term, "godforsaken." The all-male facility recently had to use an ob-gyn as a primary care physician due to the difficulty of attracting an internal medicine doctor there.

While it may be easy for some to conclude that Davis is courting favor with his contributors, the teachers unions are also powerful political players in California, and education faces unprecedented cuts. The Department of Corrections spends $26,700 per adult inmate per year. Nobody seriously wants the governor to empty the prisons to save money.

Other critics claim that California's prison costs have escalated because the system is too tough on criminals. These critics cite the "Three Strikes" law, which requires a lifetime of incarceration for criminals with three offenses, no matter how trivial. Because of the law, an unprecedented num-



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ber of relatively young people will spend the rest of their lives in prison at taxpayer expense.

Although such a law seems harsh, we should remember why we have a Three Strikes law in the first place: Richard Allen Davis. The sociopathic, unrepentant killer of Polly Klaas had a long history of criminal behavior. He had been recently released from prison when he stole Polly from her own bedroom and killed her. In the courtroom, he not only showed no remorse for his crime, he shouted obscenities at her parents. The people of California were sickened by the thought that a person so obviously dangerous should ever have been released.

As it happens, Richard Allen Davis was part of a disrupted family. His parents divorced when he was nine years old. He had virtually no contact with his mother after that. His father was often absent from the home and would leave his children with his own mother or with his different wives.

*Think how much the state would save for every young person who can go on to create a life of his own.*

We could pose the question of costs to the taxpayer in this way: Suppose the kids in the juvenile justice system were functioning well enough that they could be a reasonably normal part of society. They could then be in the educational system instead of in the juvenile justice system. Look at the per-person cost of incarceration for a year, compared with the cost of education.

The California Youth Authority is the juvenile branch of California's criminal justice system. The system works with youngsters in a variety of settings, including camps, schools, and residential treatment facilities. According to the state Legislative Analysts Office, the state spends approximately $49,200 per year per person on these programs.

If that same young person could function normally in society, he would cost taxpayers about $8,568 per year while in K-12 education. If he went on to the community college system, he would cost about $4,376 — or about a tenth of the cost of a year under the jurisdiction of the Youth Authority. If he went to the prestigious University of California system, he would cost the state $17,392. Think how much the state would save for every young person who can go on to create a life of his own rather than have to have his every move controlled or monitored by someone else.

The educational system represents an investment; the state's expenditures are likely to be repaid over the years by its graduates when they become productive citizens. By contrast, the money spent on incarceration has little prospect of turning the individual into a more productive citizen. These expenditures merely neutralize the negative impact on society of an individual who can't or won't control himself.



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# Statistics and probabilities

SOME MIGHT RESPOND that they personally are acquainted with many wonderful children of single parents. The parents are loving and giving; the children are thriving. But these anecdotal cases are not decisive. For every such story, we could produce a counter-story of a struggling single-parent family that fits the more distressing profile. The mother is a lovely person who did her best, but the boy got out of hand in his teenage years. Or the mother started out as a lovely person, but she became preoccupied with her new boyfriend or her job troubles. Her parents are heartbroken because they can see that their grandchildren are headed for trouble.

Besides, it is important to understand what statistical evidence does and does not prove. To say that a child of a single mother is twice as likely to commit a crime as the child of married parents is not to say that each and every child of every unwed mother will commit crimes or that no child of married parents will ever commit crimes. It is simply to say that growing up with unmarried parents is a significant risk factor.

Nor does saying that single-parent households are a risk factor diminish the possibility that some propensity for criminal activity might be genetically determined. Some individuals may well have a genetic propensity for aggression or for mental instability — or even for sociopathic behavior. These individuals are surely at higher than average risk for criminal activity, whether their parents are married or not. But the claim that some sociopaths are born does not preclude the possibility that some sociopaths are made. It makes sense to minimize the risk factors over which we can exercise a reasonable amount of control.

Some of the causal links between single-parent households and criminal behavior are better established than others. The causal connection between dropping out of school and higher probability of criminal behavior seems pretty straightforward and is well-documented. The link from single-parent households to attachment disorder is a weaker causal connection with a lower probability. But because a lifetime without a conscience is such a serious problem, it makes sense to try to lower the risk.

Look at it this way: When the evidence linking smoking with lung cancer first came to light, many people wanted to minimize that link. People with a serious addiction felt it was impossible for them to give up smoking. They didn't necessarily welcome the arrival of accurate information about a ship that had already sailed. "I know someone who smoked for a lifetime and never had cancer," skeptics replied. And indeed, that could be true. Smokers do not all die of smoking-related illness.

However, looking at the vast sweep of the evidence, enough people do die of smoking-related illnesses that smoking can safely be classified as a serious



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risk factor. And it is a choice-related risk factor, unlike genetic predispositions toward disease that might increase the likelihood of contracting lung cancer. It makes sense to have public health campaigns to educate the public about the risks associated with smoking, even though people irredeemably addicted to smoking might prefer not to be afflicted with this guilt- and anxiety-provoking information. Similarly, there is now enough evidence about the risks associated with growing up in a single-parent household that people are entitled to accurate information about those risks.

## What to do?

No serious person would claim that the government can or should take over marriage as a matter for "public" regulation and control, even if there are significant externalities to some behaviors. At a minimum, though, the government ought to refrain from counterproductive policies that discourage family formation or encourage family dissolution. The current regime of no-fault divorce, for example, really amounts to unilateral divorce.

Divorce imposes large costs on children. A unilateral divorce also imposes costs on the person who wants to preserve the marriage. Such people are willing to exert effort to stay married, but they don't even have the opportunity to state this case in court. These injured parties, adults and children alike, can never be made fully whole as the law would ordinarily require in a tort. It is a distortion of the idea of freedom to claim that no-fault divorce is the only policy consistent with individual liberty. Even a purely economic theory suggests that the imposition of costs on third parties should not be allowed to occur willy-nilly. Common decency requires that people who impose costs on others at least offer an account of themselves. The law should do no less.

But real policy recommendations have to go well beyond the reach of the law. In matters relating to the family, the dichotomy between "private" and "public," so familiar in policymaking circles, does not really work; these are not mutually exhaustive categories. We need an additional analytical category: "social."

Family matters are first and foremost social matters because a family is a little society. The larger society is built in crucial ways upon the little society of the family. The family is more than a collection of individuals who make quasi-market exchanges with each other. And families are not miniature political institutions. The label of "social" also points us in the right direction for solutions. The most important tools for building up the family are not primarily economic and political, but social and cultural. Accurate information is a necessary educational tool in reversing the culture of despair around the institution of marriage.

A young woman needs to know that the decision to have a child by her-



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self is a decision that exposes her and her child to a lifetime of elevated risks: of poverty, of lower education, of depression, and of prison. Getting and staying married may seem formidable to a young pregnant woman because marriage is filled with a hundred irritations and difficulties. She might think it simpler to strike out alone rather than to put up with the innumerable adjustments and accommodations that are inevitable in married life. And it is easier for us to remain uninvolved in such a decision. But we are not doing the young person any favors by acting as if we are ignorant of the likely consequences of her choices. The time-honored American ethos of "live and let live" has metamorphosed into a categorical imperative to keep our mouths shut.

For years we have heard that single parenthood is an alternative lifestyle choice that doesn't affect anyone but the person who chooses it. We have been instructed that society should loosen the stigma against it in order to promote individual freedom of choice. We have been scolded for being insufficiently sensitive to the plight of single mothers if we utter any criticism of their decisions. At the urging of various activist groups, the government and society at large have been developing a posture of neutrality among family arrangements. There are no better or worse forms of family, we are told. There are no "broken families," only "different families."

The premise behind this official posture of neutrality is false. The decision to become a single parent or to disrupt an existing family does affect people outside the immediate household. These words may seem harsh to adults who have already made crucial life decisions, but it is time to be candid. We need to create a vocabulary for lovingly, but firmly and without apology, telling young people what we know. Surely, telling the truth is no infringement on anyone's liberty. Young people need to have accurate information about the choices they face. For their own sake — and for ours.



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# Foreign Policy Immaculately Conceived

*By* Adam Garfinkle

For most normal people most of the time, thinking about U.S. foreign policy is an Andy Warhol sort of experience, which is to say that for about 15 minutes every few months (or years, for some), a foreign policy matter becomes "famous" in their consciousness. When a talented but untutored journalistic mind focuses on a foreign policy issue, particularly one that editors will pay to have written about, an amazing thing sometimes happens: All of a sudden, crystalline truth rises from the clear flame of an obvious logic that, for some unexplained reason, all of the experts and practitioners thinking and working on the problem for years never saw. This is the immaculate conception theory of U.S. foreign policy at work.

The immaculate conception theory of U.S. foreign policy operates from three central premises. The first is that foreign policy decisions always involve one and only one major interest or principle at a time. The second is that it is always possible to know the direct and peripheral impact of crisis-

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driven decisions several months or years into the future. The third is that U.S. foreign policy decisions are always taken with all principals in agreement and are implemented down the line as those principals intend — in short, they are logically coherent.

Put this way, of course, no sentient adult would defend such a theory. Even those who have never read Isaiah Berlin intuit from their own experiences that tradeoffs among incommensurable interests or principles are inevitable. They recognize that the urgent and the imminent generally push out the important and the eventual in high-level decision making. They know that disagreement and dissension often affect how public policy is made and applied. More than that, any sober soul is capable of applying this elemental understanding to particular cases if he really puts his mind to it.

Oh, really? Not so for some, apparently, when grinding axes against a deadline. Prominent examples from the recent history of U.S. policy in Southwest Asia — examples that still bear on current matters, as it happens — show that the immaculate conception theory is alive and all too well. It also shows, mindless aphorism notwithstanding, that hindsight is not necessarily 20/20.

How many times have we heard the clarion claim that the covert U.S. effort to aid the Afghan *mujahedeen* through the Pakistani regime during the 1980s was, in the end, a terrible mistake because it led first to a cruel Afghan civil war and then to the rise of the Taliban? I have lost count.

This argument is about as cogent as saying to a 79-year old man — Ralph, let's call him — that he should never have gotten married because one of his grandsons has turned out to be a schmuck. But a person does not consider marriage with the character of one of several theoretical grandchildren foremost in mind. It was not possible at the time of the nuptials for Ralph to have foreseen the personality quirks of a ne'er-do-well son-in-law not yet born; so, lo and behold, the fine upbringing that he bequeathed to his children somehow got mangled in translation to the next generation. These things happen.

Similarly, in 1980, when the initial decision was made (in the *Carter* administration, by the way), to establish links with the *mujahedeen*, the preeminent concern of American decision makers was not the future of Afghanistan, but the future of the Soviet Union and its position in Southwest Asia. Whatever the Politburo intended at the time, the consolidation of Soviet control in Afghanistan would have given future Soviet leaders options they would not otherwise have had. In light of the strategic realities of the day, the American concern was entirely reasonable: Any group of U.S. decision makers would have thought and done more or less the same thing, even if they could have foreseen the risks to which they might expose the country on other scores.

But, of course, such foresight was impossible. Who in 1980 or 1982 or



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1985 could have foreseen the confluence of events that would bring al Qaeda into being, with a haven in Afghanistan? The Saudi policies that led to bin Laden's exile and the Kuwait crisis that led to the placement of U.S. forces on Saudi soil had not yet happened — and neither could have been reasonably anticipated. The civil strife that followed the exit of the Red Army from Afghanistan, and which established the preconditions for the rise of the Taliban government, had not yet happened either. Of course, despite the policy's overall success in undermining the Soviet position in Afghanistan, entrusting Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate to manage aid to the *mujahedeen* turned out to be problematic, but who of the immaculate conception set knows whether there were better alternatives available at the time? There weren't; a tradeoff was involved, and it was a tradeoff known to carry certain risks.

True, the United States walked away too soon from Afghanistan after the Red Army departed in 1989, but the Berlin Wall was falling and it seemed that more important issues were at hand. (And they *were* more important.) Besides, *pace* the third premise of the theory of the immaculate conception, there was disagreement among administration experts as to what would happen in Afghanistan. One prominent insider, born in Afghanistan, was confident that things would not go sour. He was mistaken, but his assessment was not unreasonable. These things happen.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF immaculate conception-style analysis, also very well worn, specifically concerns the shah of Iran; but this example has a generic character known as the "friendly tyrants" problem. The particular claim is almost endlessly made that it was a terrible mistake for the CIA to have overthrown Mohammed Mossadegh in 1953 to restore the shah to his Peacock throne, for that, it is averred, is what brought the Ayatollah Khomeini to power and sired the disaster of 1978-79 (and, one could reasonably add, the disaster of 1979 to present). The generic "friendly tyrants" argument is now applied widely if thoughtlessly to U.S. support over the years for undemocratic regimes in Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Pakistan, and other Muslim countries. The argument, such as it is, goes like this: The people in these countries hate the United States because the U.S. government is complicit in their being repressed by ugly and incompetent regimes. Just as in Iran, they predict, we'll be sorry one day — "after the revolution comes" — for ever having helped the "bad guys."

Now, the fall of the shah and the rise of the Islamic Republic is a complex case; one could write an entire book about it. Indeed, some have done just that — and all of the serious books on the subject show that the immaculate conception theory has it wrong. American interests in Iran in the early 1950s (the broader Western interest, too; the British had as much to do with the fall of Mossadegh as did the United States) had to do with Cold War geopolitics. Mossadegh was anti-Western by rhetoric and policy dispo-



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sition. When he came to power in 1951, the Truman administration worried, particularly in light of Soviet behavior in northern Iran after World War II, that a populist regime of that sort would end up being allied with or suborned by the Soviet Union. The coming of the Eisenhower administration did not allay U.S. fears as Mossadegh's policies became ever more worrisome, and so a plan devised mostly before Eisenhower took office went successfully forward with the result that Iran remained a bulwark of Western defenses in the Middle East and Southwest Asia for the critical next quarter-century.

It is easy now to dismiss this benefit as "mere," but it was not mere at the time. The pro-Western orientation of Iran from a time before Suez until the Camp David Accords was of enormous value to U.S. and Western statecraft. Not only did it make military planning for Southwest Asia a far less onerous task for the United States than it would have been if Iran had been a Soviet client, but it helped balance regional geopolitics for important American allies, notably Turkey and Israel. The shah's relatively moderate hand in the development of OPEC, at least until 1974, was also of immeasurable benefit to the postwar international economy. Playing back history in the counterfactual tense is a frustrating and often futile exercise, but as thought exercises go, trying to imagine how constrained U.S. policies might have been with Iran on the wrong side of the Cold War is sobering. Whether one takes the Suez crisis (which was botched enough from the American side as it was), the twin Middle East crises of 1958 over revolution in Iraq and near-civil war in Lebanon, or the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars, U.S. options military and diplomatic would have been much impoverished. Indeed, the whole face of U.S. policy in the region, which was overall a very successful one, would have looked very different and likely much more dour.

*Iranian modernization as directed by the shah went farther than any that Mossadegh could have achieved.*

Key to the immaculate conception case with regard to Iran is the rather flat portrait presented of the shah's moral and political debility. The United States cannot be guilty by association with tyranny in the eyes of the tyrannized unless the protected ruler is indeed vile. But the shah was not vile, and he was not unpopular for most of his tenure. His repressive tendencies came fairly late, after he had lost several trusted and wise advisors and after he became ill with the cancer that eventually killed him. For most of his rule he tried to emulate his father, Reza Shah, as a modernizer — and with the White Revolution he made much progress in that regard. He dispossessed the clerical estates and tamed the power of the landed aristocracy. As serious students of modernization know (alas, that leaves out almost all write-from-the-hip journalists), land reform is absolutely essential to economic and



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eventually political modernization; by almost any standard the shah's efforts in this regard were impressive. Iranian modernization as directed from the Peacock throne probably went farther and was more sustainable than any that Mossadegh and his disputatious colleagues and successors could have achieved. Indeed, had Iran come under a form of even limited neo-imperial Soviet influence like that from which Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, Syria, and other countries have so much suffered, its "reforms" might have actually been retrogressive.

More than that, though the immaculate conceptionists tend not to know it, the shah granted the vote to women in 1964. It was this act that first galvanized clerical opposition to the regime and was the catalyst for the first occasion upon which Ruhollah Khomeini went out and got himself arrested. We know how the story turned sad in 1978, but the success of the shah's reforms went so deep in Iranian society that the rule of the Islamic Republic will, in the end, not stick. Perhaps the best illustration of this is that the mullahs have not dared suggest that the vote be taken away from women, though this is precisely what their theology would mandate. The clerical regime's reticence on this score defines a significant limit, a social red line, that leaves open a dynamic in which the empowerment of women may well drive Iranian society toward pluralism, the flowering of liberal constitutionalism, and eventually democracy.

*It was the bungling of the Carter White House that allowed the clerics to seize power.*

Even that is not quite all. Immaculate conception theorists hold that once the shah was restored, his repressive misrule made the Ayatollah Khomeini inevitable. Not only is the shah's repression distorted and exaggerated in their telling of it, but it was the bungling of the Carter administration that allowed the clerics to seize power. Illustrating the difference between an ignoramus and a fool, some of that administration's cabinet members not merely believed — they actually said it publicly — that Ayatollah Khomeini was a "saint" who would soon retire from politics. Worse, the administration actively dissuaded the Iranian military, via the infamous Huyser mission among other modalities, from preventing the mullahs from taking power. Supporting the shah was good policy. Failure to adjust when the shah's touch slipped was unfortunate but not fatal. The mismanagement of the endgame was disastrous, but it was also entirely avoidable.

This is not the place to rehearse the larger "friendly tyrants" debate; only suffice it to say that since countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia were undemocratic long before the United States ever began to support their governments, the argument that the United States is somehow responsible for their being undemocratic is a little hard to follow. However they came to be undemocratic, U.S. support does implicate us in their misanthropies — true



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enough. But once again, it is a mistake to think that one and only one set of interests is at play at one time. The proper question to ask is: What have been the interests and principles — plural — at issue, and what have been the available alternative policy choices to deal with them, particularly when a given action may advance one interest at the cost of retarding the achievement of another? Was the United States ever in a position merely to wave its hand and bring democracy to Egypt or Saudi Arabia? Would it have been responsible to try to do so in light of the other strategic interests we held in common with these countries — the utility of their anti-Soviet postures, their role in preserving the stability of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, their contribution to moderating the price of oil and hence aiding the health of the international economy, and others besides? Not only were these no small matters, neither were they bereft of moral implications. It is not morality but moral posturing to wear human rights concerns on one's sleeve, indicating as it usually does one's favoritism for intentions over consequences, while simultaneously presuming that concern for the structural elements of international peace and prosperity are the domain of the cold, gray overseers of corporate and national equities. This verges on ethical illiteracy.

*Cold War habits have died hard in some places; in more than a few, they are breathing still.*

In any event, the answer to both aforementioned questions is plainly "no," and *any* group of responsible American decision makers, sitting in the seats and seeing the world as those decision makers must have sat and seen, would have reached the same conclusions. Could we have attained a better balance between our strategic interests and our democratic principles in relations with such countries? No doubt we could have and should have. It is true, too, that a certain condescension toward Middle Easterners and their social and political proclivities was in quiet evidence. (President Reagan broke through this condescension once, in spectacular if limited fashion, when during the 1985 Achille Lauro tragedy he contended against Egyptian pleas that Americans "understand" the Arab cultural definition of a "white lie" with the assertion that Egyptians were perfectly capable of understanding the American view as well.) The point, of course, is this: In the pinch during the Cold War, when major decisions had to be made, U.S. decision makers (even in the Carter administration) never allowed democratic reform and human rights concerns to trump all other interests. This was particularly so in countries where democracy was not ingrained in local political culture and where U.S. efforts were therefore unlikely to bear fruit. Of course this was the right approach to take, for the Cold War was the preeminent moral stake at play in the world. Of what value would an accumulation of moralist gesticulations have been against the survival of Soviet power?

But that was then, and this is now. Cold War habits have died hard in



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some places; in more than a few, unfortunately, they are breathing still. What Pakistan represented to the United States during the Cold War, when India was a Soviet ally and China was a tacit ally of the United States also allied with Pakistan, was one thing. What Pakistan represented after 1991 was something else, but the U.S. policy establishment was slow to mark and act upon the change. That establishment has been even slower to reckon the meaning of the end of the Cold War for U.S. interests in Korea and Northeast Asia generally. It made sense to risk war and to pay other costs in Korea between 1953 and 1991, when that peninsula was tied to a larger stake; if it has made sense since 1991, the logic has not been demonstrated, to say the least. Should we have adjusted policy toward Arab and other "friendly tyrants" after the end of the Cold War, when the balance of our interests changed? Absolutely. Since September 11, 2001, this conclusion has finally begun to sink in, as has a sense of regret that the U.S. government did not reach it sooner. Mistakes have indeed been made, but not the ones the immaculate conceptionists cite.

THESE EXAMPLES OF the immaculate conception theory of U.S. foreign policy tend to come from the political left, where the attack on realism's supposed interest-based bias in favor of a values-based one has long succumbed to the "mass" production techniques of modern journalism. (Just who really acts in the service of values is not all that clear, as suggested above, but never mind.) The theory of the immaculate conception is not limited to the left, however, as the mother of all examples — the end of the Gulf War in late winter 1991 — demonstrates.

It has become axiomatic in many right-of-center circles that the decision not to march to Baghdad and bring down the Baath Party in February 1991 was a terrible mistake. Some in the George H.W. Bush administration believed that at the time, and President Bush himself did subsequently acknowledge some misjudgments — though not the decision to abjure an occupation of Baghdad. Rather, the former President Bush admitted that the exact terms of the ceasefire and the failure of the United States to assist the Kurdish and Shia uprisings were connected mistakes. He has it exactly right.

There were good and not-so-good reasons for the decision not to march to Baghdad. Judging from what was known *then* — not three months or two years or ten years afterwards — it is both possible and still important to ponder them. Indeed, given America's current undertaking in Iraq, it is, or ought to be, irresistible.

A reason given at the time to stay away from Baghdad was that the United States had U.N. Security Council authorization only to liberate Kuwait, not to invade Iraq. This was true, technically, and the United States does need to be mindful of how its actions affect the systemic contours of international law, an institution that benefits us more than it benefits most others. That said, this was not a strong argument. Had the administration viewed other considerations differently, the U.N. barrier alone would not



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have stopped it.

Among those other considerations was the concern that the United States could not count on a continuation of very low casualties among coalition forces once the battle was moved to Iraqi soil. That concern was predicated on the fear that the battle would not remain conventionally fought if the regime in Baghdad concluded that its days were literally numbered. The worry was that higher casualties would undermine the coalition and reduce public support for the war. We do not know whether the Hammurabi or the Medina divisions of the Iraqi Republican Guard would have fought well on their own soil in 1991. Nor is it certain that the Iraqis would have used chemical or biological weapons against U.S. forces. But the possibilities were not so far-fetched that responsible American decision makers would have failed to take them seriously.

*It was not, and is not, borders that worry the Saudis, but sectarian loyalties.*

A third argument, now all but forgotten, was that Iraq was a Soviet client, and to occupy Iraq would be to humiliate the Soviet Union, with whom we hoped to create a new world order. This, of course, was an argument that some people are glad is now forgotten, since it reveals the fact that some key American decision makers suffered a massive failure of imagination. They could not conceive of a world without the Soviet Union, which lasted only another 10 months. At the time, however, given the premise of a surviving USSR, this too was not an unreasonable consideration.

Yet another argument was that bringing down the Baath would splinter Iraq and, via its Shia population, provide a major advantage to Iran at Saudi expense. People disagreed then, and still disagree, about the plausibility of this scenario. No serious regional expert has ever credited it; all agree that Arab and Persian blood is thicker than sectarian Islamic water and that Iraqi Shia are not unionist-minded with Iran. The administration at the time took this danger seriously, however, not least because its policy was ultimately Saudi-centered, not Kuwaiti-centered — and the Saudis were adamant about this danger.

But why? Do the Saudis understand their own neighborhood less well than Western experts? Of course not. The Saudis were not worried by Iranian irredentism per se, but as good Muslims they follow Abu Bakr's admonition to know one's genealogies, not to be as the ignorant peasants who say they come from this or that place. It was not, and is not, borders that worry the Saudis, but sectarian loyalties. They very much prefer a Sunni-dominated authoritarian Iraq than a looser, more populist Shia Iraq. They know that Shia are the majority in Iraq, and they have watched in recent years as a similarly despised and downtrodden Shia Arab minority in Lebanon has risen to significant political status. They do not want to see



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such a thing repeated on their northern border, not just because the religion of the Wahabbis abhors Shia saint cults and theological apostasy, but because probably the majority population in Al-Hasa province, where most of Saudi Arabia's oil lies, is Shia. They fear sectarian contagion from a Shia-dominated Iraq, not a split, territorially fractured Iraq. But they fed American leaders a line in 1991, and those leaders appear to have swallowed it whole.

Finally, some argued that an American-led occupation of an Arab capital would exhume all of the gruesome historical demons of the previous three centuries of Muslim-Western conflict from their netherworld haunts, making the United States the focus of enormous resentment and hatred throughout the Arab and Muslim worlds. We might think of ourselves as liberators, and the Iraqis might have welcomed us the morning after. But then how to set up a new regime and take our leave without undermining that regime's nationalist credentials? (Hint: This is difficult.) How to create a government decentralized enough to accommodate Iraq's ethnic and sectarian heterogeneity but not so decentralized as to tempt Iraq's neighbors to turn the country into a souk for espionage, smuggling, and general mayhem? (Hint: This is even more difficult.) How to build a defense force after the fact that is capable of defending Iraq from large neighbors like Iran but not at the same time "too" large juxtaposed against smaller neighbors like Kuwait? (Hint: This is impossible.) So getting to Baghdad was never the problem; getting out of it without creating more trouble than we would have resolved was the hitch.

*Getting to Baghdad was never the problem; getting out of it was the hitch.*

Alas, as should be all too clear, this is not a mere historical footnote. It is a problem still resonating a dozen years later, and none of the problems contemplated in 1991 have gotten easier. This, ultimately, is the best reason for not having marched to Baghdad, and that reason, conjoined to the belief of virtually every expert that Saddam would not survive six months after such a trouncing humiliation, explains why we did not then go there. It was a reasonable prediction, but it was wrong. These things happen.

It would not have been wrong, however, had the two mistakes to which President George H.W. Bush has pointed not been made. Had U.S. civilian authorities not ceded their decision-making power to General Norman Schwarzkopf, who let the Iraqis fly those helicopters, and had the United States simultaneously supported the Kurdish and Shia rebellions, Saddam would not have survived in power. So yes, mistakes were made; but, again, not the ones most often raised by the theorists of the immaculate conception persuasion.

Now, why were those mistakes made? One reason was disagreement near the top, and President Bush *pere* tried to have it both ways. He wanted



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Saddam gone, but he did not want to pay a price in American blood and entanglement if he could help it. He wanted Saddam gone, but not at the cost of provoking a crisis with Saudi Arabia or aiding the mullahs of Tehran. He split the differences among his advisors and hoped for the best, and this was by no means unreasonable. It happened not to have been successful, but in whose life does every wager pay off?

Had the president ordered the occupation of Baghdad in 1991, we would not have had to put up with Saddam for the past dozen years, and that would have been more than a small mercy. But for all anyone knows, American troops would have been there all along, for a dozen years, and who knows the larger consequences of that in the Arab and Muslim worlds — and of how those consequences might have redounded back on us? Who knows for certain that other, even more dangerous consequences than our having to live with Saddam these past 12 years would not have been set in motion? No one can possibly know this, which is why the popular condemnation of the Gulf War's endgame often sounds far too cocksure against the available, but inevitably incomplete, evidence. It is perfectly true, as Paul Wolfowitz wrote back in 1994, that "by and large, wars are not constructive acts: they are better judged by what they prevent than by what they accomplish. But what a war has prevented is impossible ever to know with certainty, and for many observers is never a subject of serious reflection." It is also true, however, that what wars prevent may sometimes end up benign while what they accomplish can evoke justifiable regret. It is, unfortunately, not an unreasonable fear that Gulf War II will illustrate that very point to our considerable disappointment.

AMERICAN PRESIDENTS, who have to make the truly big decisions of U.S. foreign policy, must come to a judgment with incomplete information, often under stress and merciless time constraints, and frequently with their closest advisors painting one another in shades of disagreement. The choices are never between obviously good and obviously bad, but between greater and lesser sets of risks, greater and lesser prospects of danger. Banal as it sounds, we do well to remind ourselves from time to time that things really are *not* so simple, even when one's basic principles are clear and correct. When President George W. Bush strove, from September 12, 2001 onward, to make the moral and strategic stakes of the war on terrorism clear, he was immediately enshrouded by an inescapable fog of irrepressible fact: namely, that our two most critical tactical allies in the war on terrorism, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, were the two governments whose policies had led most directly to 9-11. If that was not enough ambiguity with which to start the war on terrorism, the various sideswipes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict soon provided more.

Does this mean that George Bush, with his Bush Doctrine, is now evincing a form of the immaculate conception theory of U.S. foreign policy? Is the administration simplifying to our peril that which cannot, or at any rate



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ought not, be simplified? Not necessarily. An administration has a right to its own rhetoric, and with it a right to put some distance between that rhetoric and its actual conduct. As it is true, as Henry Kissinger has said, that covert action should not be confused with charity work, the art of public diplomacy is not and should not be tantamount to telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

But the president does invite harm if he thinks himself free from having to make tradeoffs; if he thinks, for example, that by some sort of ex cathedra definition there can be no long-term political downside to a protracted U.S. occupation of Iraq. We do take risks that imperfect policy in the here and now will give rise to unknowable dangers in the there and then. As bad as Saddam and the Baath have been, they have not been Islamist in orientation. If we are not prepared to sit in Baghdad for half a century, who can guarantee that such a regime will not in due course follow the war? And if we do sit in Baghdad for a long time, who can guarantee that our doing so will not engender such tendencies in states nearby? And the president courts trouble if he somehow loses sight of the need to wend his way among advisors who do not always agree and underlings who do not always behave. Splitting the difference among differently minded advisors works, or at least doesn't obviously fail, when incremental policy fits the task. When boldness is required, such splitting is liable to give rise to half-measures (and mis-measures) that only make things worse.

The president will also find no escape, even long after he leaves the White House, from the accusations of the immaculate conception school, whose students will not cease to pronounce the judgment of the sophomoric from now until thistles lose their barbs. One can only imagine what simplicities they will fabricate from the detritus of this war. Of this irritation, what can one say? These things happen.



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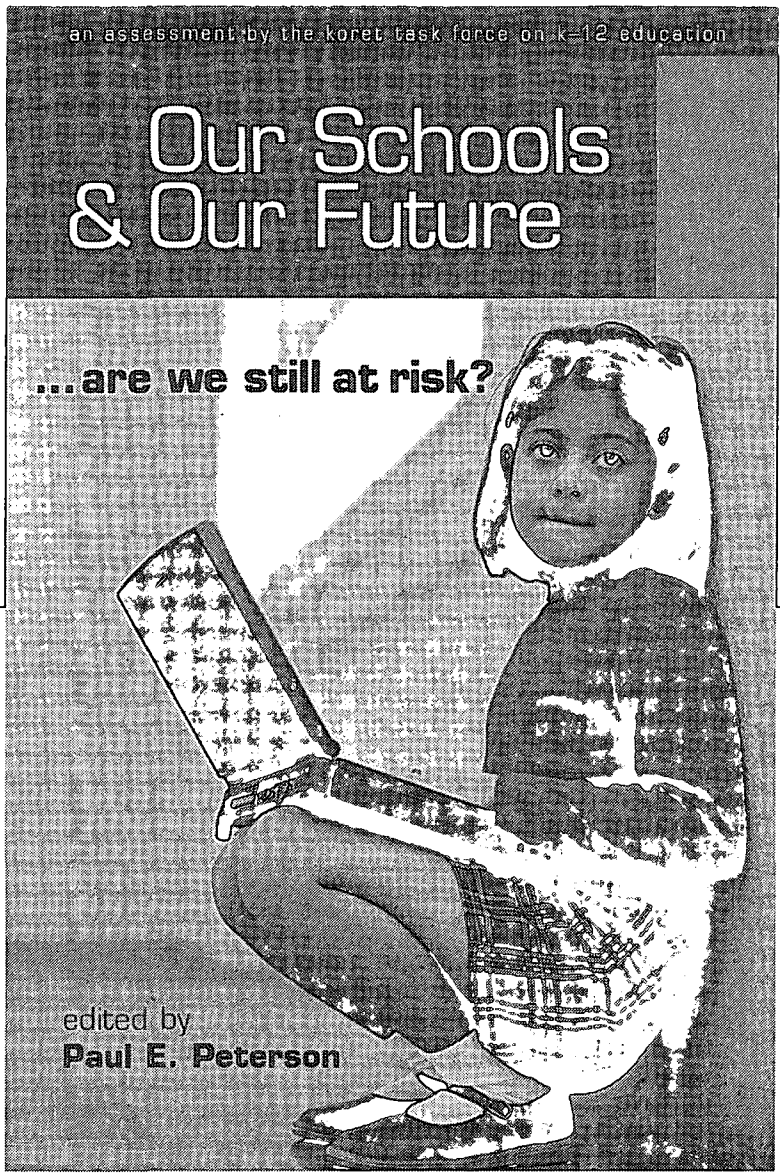
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# BOOKS

# Fearless Sidney Hook

## *By* THOMAS MAIN

SIDNEY HOOK. *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx: A Revolutionary Interpretation.* Expanded edition. Ernest B. Hook, editor. PROMETHEUS BOOKS. 539 PAGES. $32.00

SIDNEY HOOK. *The Essential Essays: Sidney Hook on Pragmatism, Democracy and Freedom.* Foreword by Alan Ryan. Robert B. Talisse and Robert Tempio, editors. PROMETHEUS BOOKS. 455 PAGES. $32.00

BACK IN THE mid-eighties I attended a conference at which I met the director of a conservative think tank. His organization wanted to establish an annual award for distinguished careers in public affairs writing. Did I have an idea about who should be the first recipient, he asked me. I suggested Sidney Hook, thinking of his anti-communist and pro-Cold War work. Immediately the director's face lengthened. Oh no, that wouldn't do, I was told. Didn't I realize that Hook was a secular humanist?

This episode testifies to the eclecticism of Hook's thought. Hook's was an array of positions that did not fall into any obvious ideological pattern: socialist, anti-communist, secular humanist, pro-welfare state, educational progressive, anti-affirmative action, cold warrior, anti-conservative, and plenty more. Hook's understanding of Marxism was in itself a complicated combination of opinions: For most of his career he rejected nearly every idea characteristic of Marxism and abhorred regimes that designated themselves as Marxist, but he still respected Marx as a democrat and a philosopher. One could not possibly agree with Hook on everything. Readers who were more concerned with *what* Hook believed rather than *how* he believed it and argued for it were, given the heterogeneity of Hook's opinions, likely to find something or other objectionable.

THERE IS, however, one opinion — or better, one set of opinions — that one had to share with Hook in order to admire him much. This was his anti-communism and the policy conclusions that he drew from it. After the 1930s, anti-communism was probably the theme Hook most frequently took up. Hook's writing was always intense, but when he wrote on anti-communism it could be with the urgency of someone calling life-saving instructions to a drowning victim. Such was the tone of his book from the early fifties, *Heresy, Yes — Conspiracy, No*, in which he argued that communism was not "an open and honestly avowed heresy but an interna-

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tional conspiracy centered in the Kremlin, in a state of undeclared war against democratic institutions." Hook was very seldom personal in his polemics but he could be stinging in his characterization of an antagonist's reasoning when the issue of communism came up. Thus, he blasted "Lillian Hellman, who in her book *Scoundrel*

*Precisely what Hook did not do was allow his anti-communism, or any other single idea, to determine the whole of his thought. Many of the characteristic ideas that he continued to express prolifically to the end of his life had nothing to do with anti-communism.*

*Time* seems to have duped a generation of critics devoid of historical memory and critical common sense." Or again, he began his condemnatory review of a book by David Caute on the McCarthy period by noting, "It is a well known phenomenon that without containing a single falsehood, a description of an historical situation, personage or event can still be a lying account." Sometimes, in presenting a passage from anti-anti-communist authors, Hook could not resist inserting a "sic" or even a "sic!" in the quotation, as if reading such stuff was almost too much to bear.

Hook faithfully pursued what he saw as the policy consequences of his anti-communism. He supported the Cold War, rejected the New Left, and — most fatefully for his reputation — opposed allowing Communist Party members to hold teaching positions. All of this led to the common complaint that Hook was an obsessive anti-communist. Indeed, Arthur Schlesinger has claimed that Hook's "great error" was "in letting anti-communism take over his life." This judgment is unfair. Precisely what Hook did not do was allow his anti-communism, or any other single idea, to determine the whole of his thought. Many of the characteristic ideas that he continued to express prolifically to the end of his life had nothing to do with anti-communism. Nonetheless, anti-communism was a major theme in Hook's work, and the perception that he was overly preoccupied with it has had a negative impact on his reputation.

Allegedly obsessive anti-communism is not the only feature of Hook's work that has damaged his reputation. Hook was a polemicist, "probably the greatest polemicist of [the twentieth] century," as Edward Shils has written. And Hook's modal form of expression was the essay, rather than the book, and that often published in a nonacademic journal. His philosophical interests — Marxism, pragmatism, and public affairs — were considered marginal concerns in academic philosophy throughout much of his university career. For this reason, an article in the *National Post* (December 17, 2001)



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condemns the trajectory Hook's career took after the publication of one of his early books as follows: "unlike Hook's later and more polemical work, *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx* was a genuine original contribution to philosophy." In this way, Hook has often been seen as a politicized intellectual journalist rather than as a serious philosopher.

Recently, however, this judgment seems to be waning. Several developments suggest that Hook is beginning to receive serious consideration as something other than a street-fighting debater. One indication of this change was a symposium entitled "Sidney Hook Reconsidered: A Centennial Celebration," held at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York last October. *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, originally published in 1933, is back in print for the first time in decades. And a much-needed representative sample of Hook's essays from throughout his career is now available, *The Essential Essays: Sidney Hook on Pragmatism, Democracy and Freedom.*

What might be called the archeological approach to reinterpreting Hook is embodied in the republication of *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx* and has been given its most complete expression in the 1997 book *Young Sidney Hook: Marxist and Pragmatist* by Christopher Phelps. The characteristic feature of this approach is to focus on Hook's work from the 1930s and early 1940s, especially the Marx book, as well as various essays written about the same time and, to some extent, the book *From Hegel to Marx*. During this period Hook was a communist — not in the sense of being a member of any communist party, nor in the sense of subscribing to the "line" of any such party. Rather, as he explained in his essay "Communism Without Dogmas," Hook was a communist in the sense that he was an independent, critical expositor and defender of the political and philosophical "principles to be found in the writings of Marx and Engels, and in the economic and political works of Lenin and Trotsky." For most of his life Hook's own attitude toward his early works was largely negative. This was not because he judged them incompetent efforts, but because, as his son Ernest B. Hook writes in his preface to the new edition of *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*: "[H]e came to repudiate and abandon almost all of the views he expressed in this volume. . . . Certainly I sensed that he feared that some overenthusiastic new readers might be inspired inappropriately to foolish views or actions."

That is, the mature, anti-communist Hook rejected his youthful communist writings and for decades did not consent to having them republished. Indeed, Ernest Hook tells us that the reissuance of *Karl Marx* "violates his [Sidney Hook's] only injunction to me about his professional afterlife. . . . [A]llowing it to be reprinted still feels like an act of betrayal." Why, then, has the volume been made available, and what is the point of the current interest in the young Sidney Hook?

Part of the reason for the interest in the book is the judgment that, as Phelps argues, "As a full-length work of philosophy, Hook never did anything comparable again." But in what,



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according to this approach, does the excellence of the young Hook and the relative decline of the old Hook consist? In his book Phelps writes:

> [T]his biography argues that Hook's early revolutionary anti-Stalinism had a character quite distinct in principle from his later Cold War liberalism, despite subsequent obfuscations by friends and critics alike. These findings corroborate in greater detail what Julius Jacobson, editor of *New Politics*, has written regarding the New York intellectuals: "It was not anti-Stalinism that proved to be sufficient cause for that capitulation to the West; the causal link between what they were and what they became was their abandonment of an independent socialist perspective."

It is primarily for its lucid articulation of this "independent socialist perspective" that Phelps recommends to us Hook's early work. Phelps argues, both in his book and in an introduction to the new edition of *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, that the particular form this perspective takes is a synthesis of Marxism with the quintessential American philosophy, pragmatism. Given his unique position as a student of John Dewey and also a Marx scholar, Hook was able to bring off this synthesis and create an Americanized "Communism Without Dogmas." Marxists of various stripes have rejected this commingling of Marxism with what they see as the bourgeois philosophy of pragmatism, and part of Phelps's project is to argue for the validity of this pragmatic interpretation of Marx: "The familiar philosophical thesis that Hook's anticommunism was the simple result of his pragmatism is a poor substitute for biography and history. Precisely because of his pragmatist understanding, the young Hook was led to emphasize the *revolutionary* elements of action, experiment, and democracy in Marx." Phelps believes that the present-day left can learn from Hook's early writings:

> The American left is once again in need of hope to carry it through hard times. The questions that Sidney Hook considered in his writings on revolution and democracy remain vital, and many of the solutions he put forward years ago have remarkable resonance today [including] his insistence on the ability of working people and their allies though democratic and participatory activity to change the world and their own lives.

The later Hook, in this analysis, fails to be of similar relevance because "the key concept of democracy in his writings became an abstract standard, stripped of class analysis, with almost exclusively moralistic meaning." But this contraction of Hook's conception of democracy showed "[t]he degree to which Hook's Marxism had evaporated and his pragmatism become a pale shadow of its former self." In other words, the mixing of Marxism with pragmatism was valid; Hook's problem, allegedly, was that he backed off from the radical democratic implications of *both* these philosophies.

Phelps's work of intellectual archeology has several virtues. It is an impressive work of literary scholarship and greatly expands our understanding not only of the early Hook, but of



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American intellectual life during the crucial decade of the 1930s. Hook's readers have known all along that he passed through a radical phase in his youth, but the detail of his thought from this period was generally unknown because the mature Hook never cared to expand on it. Phelps's book, together with the republication of *Karl Marx*, brings this lost world to light.

Phelps is also right to insist that Hook's project of reinterpreting Marxism in light of pragmatism was a legitimate approach to developing a workable progressive social philosophy. Other philosophers have noted the affinity between pragmatism and Marxism. No less an authority than Bertrand Russell in *A History of Western Philosophy* (Simon and Schuster, 1945) notes Marx's espousal of "the theory called 'pragmatism' or 'instrumentalism'" as follows:

> [Marx] called himself a materialist, but not of the eighteenth-century sort. His sort, which, under Hegelian influence, he called "dialectical," differed in an important way from traditional materialism, and was more akin to what is now called instrumentalism.

The whole chapter on Marx in Russell's *History*, with its emphasis on Marx's activist theory of perception and knowledge, presents a very pragmatic interpretation of Marx. In fact, it seems possible that, since Russell was familiar with *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, his reading of Marx might well have been based on Hook's work. However that may be, the point is that the affinity of Marxism and pragmatism is real, and the effort to fuse the two and so produce a progressive social philosophy relevant to the American scene was an intellectually legitimate enterprise.

Hook, furthermore, was not the only thinker to attempt to renew Marxism by reinterpreting it in light of later philosophical developments. Phelps usefully puts the early Hook in the company of the so-called Western Marxists: Western European thinkers such as Sartre, Gramsci, and the Frankfurt School, who rethought Marxism in the context of various non-Marxist philosophies. The most obvious parallel here is Georg Lukacs's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), in which the author tries to replace the scientistic aspects of Marx's thought with a subjectivistic methodology borrowed from literary and cultural studies. If Hook's political evolution had not taken him rightward, he might very well have enjoyed the kind of vogue among the New Left that Lukacs and other Western Marxists did. Indeed, one source reports that unauthorized, mimeographed copies of *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx* were printed up and distributed among student radicals of the sixties.

No, the problem with Hook's fusion of Marxism and pragmatism is not the pragmatism, but the Marxism. Reading *Karl Marx* now is a strange experience. Hook's characteristic earnestness and lucidity are there, and the book still works as an introduction to the imposing structure of Marx's thought. But all the characteristic weaknesses of Marxist thought are also evident, and they make it impossible to accept the book as an adequate analysis of social



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problems either then or now.

For example, Hook emphasizes Marx's theory of value which "would distribute the social product in accordance with some social plan whose fundamental principle is not the accumulation of capital for private profit but its intelligent use in behalf of mankind." Two questions immediately present themselves: Just what is social planning? And is it possible? One does not have to buy the arguments of the Austrian economists in all their detail to realize that social planning, in the sense of replacing markets with centralized management of the economy, is almost certain to lead to disaster. And Hook does seem to contemplate replacing markets, for he specifically contrasts the Marxist theory of value with "the operations of the laws of supply and demand."

Like most Marxists of his time, the young Hook is completely unconcerned with what social planning means and how is it supposed to work in the absence of markets. Such placid unconcern is troubling enough given that the anti-planning argument had already been developed in Ludwig von Mises's *Socialism*, published in German in 1922 and available to any Marxist who took the planning problem seriously. And, of course, readers of the twenty-first century — with the experience of the Stalinist five-year plans and the failed centralized economies of the former Soviet-bloc states before them — will find it hard to take seriously an analysis that entirely ignores the planning question.

*Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx* is also remarkably naïve about the role of states in political life. The issue of the nature of the state is important because, Hook claims, "it can be categorically stated that it is Marx's theory of the state which distinguishes the true Marxist from the false." Hook quotes with approval Marx's dictum from *The Communist Manifesto* that "The modern state power is merely a committee which manages the common business of the bourgeoisie." The idea is that the state is wholly a class phenomenon and that no change in the state, short of revolution, can alter the fundamental class character of the state. Hook does not hesitate to conclude that gradual reformism is doomed:

> The attempt made by "liberal" Marxists throughout the world . . . to separate the existing economic order from the existing state as well as their belief that the existing state can be used as an instrument by which the economic system can be "gradually revolutionized" into state capitalism or state socialism, must be regarded as a fundamental distortion of Marxism. "Liberal Marxism" and "gradual revolution" are contradictions in terms.

Such passages make for depressing reading for several reasons. First, even at the time the passages were written, the reforms of the New Deal were already underway and were soon to demonstrate that employing state power to transform the economy was indeed possible. True enough, when Hook wrote *Karl Marx* he had not yet seen the success of the New Deal. But then neither had his fellow intellectuals supported the New Deal, kept their wits about them, and trusted in the democratic political process rather than revolution. Almost as if determined to



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demonstrate his unreasonableness, the young Hook rejects the possibility of gradual revolution in the U.S. — a possibility broached by Marx himself! Hook quotes Marx to the effect that "we do not deny that there are certain countries, such as the United States and England, in which the workers may hope to secure their ends by peaceful means." Hook then pronounces himself mystified as to "what led Marx and Engels into the error of qualifying their general position [on the necessity of violent revolution] as they did." The young Hook's position was ultramontane even by 1930s and Marxist standards and is all the less relevant to present-day readers, who are familiar with successful reform efforts not only in America and England, but even in places like South Africa and Mexico.

One could continue citing such flaws in *Karl Marx*, but pointing out the deficiencies of a communist analysis written 70 years ago is an unsatisfying business. The weakness of such an approach is glaring to today's reader, as it was glaring to Hook himself not long after he wrote it. Phelps's work and the republication of *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx* do not, unfortunately, unearth a forgotten but viable young Hook, useable as a tool for political analysis today. What these efforts do provide is a deeper appreciation of Hook's later work. Reading *Karl Marx* and following the career of the young Hook, one can feel the seriousness and passion with which he made the case for communism. The shock and humiliation that such a man must have felt as his cherished cause was blasted to atoms by the catastrophes of the thirties — the rise of Stalin, the show trials, the failure of communism as a defense against fascism — must have been nearly overwhelming. It is of no use to argue, as Phelps does, that Hook could have retreated to an anti-Stalinist but pro-communist position. The foundation of Hook's pragmatic Marxism was the insight that the truth of an idea is to be found in its effects. And surely few ideas ever had more disastrous effects rained down upon them than communism in the thirties. With this rediscovered material before us, Hook's later obsessive anti-communism, if such it was, is, if anything, more intelligible.

ANOTHER APPROACH to rediscovering Hook has found expression in the publication of *The Essential Essays: Sidney Hook on Pragmatism, Democracy and Freedom*, edited by Robert B. Talisse and Robert Tempio. As its title suggests, *Essential Essays* is an exercise in connoisseurship, a collection of what the editors take to be Hook's best essays, culled from his entire career. Quality is not the only criterion of choice, however, as the editors have elected to leave out the polemics for which Hook was so famous and to include only more strictly philosophical works. The object of this approach is, as Alan Ryan puts it in his foreword, to "reveal that the philosophical Hook was alive and well alongside the street-fighting Hook throughout those years [1930-1985]."

The philosophic Hook on display here is important not so much for any particular position he took, but because of the ideal or paradigm of a politically engaged philosopher that he presents. By now all of us — except for certain economists — realize that ideas do in



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fact make a difference in political life. But what type of ideas makes a difference? In a well-known essay on this subject Mark Moore argued, "Most such ideas are not very complex or differentiated. There is no clear separation of ends from means, of diagnosis from interventions, of assumptions from demonstrated facts, or of blame from causal effect. All are run together in a simple gestalt." We are all familiar with such "ideas," which perhaps are better described as symbols or even sound bites: "lower the rates, broaden the base," "close the back door to open the front door," and "end welfare as we know it" are typical examples. Whatever one thinks of such ideas, and of an intellectual environment in which their manufacture and dissemination is a salient aspect, they were not Hook's stock in trade. (Although, interestingly, one of Hook's least fortunate exercises certainly has the ring of a sound bite: *Heresy, Yes — Conspiracy, No.*) Such ideas were more like the raw material on which Hook worked his art. And Hook's art was precisely the disentangling of means and ends, causality and blame, diagnosis and intervention, and so forth. *The Essential Essays* is perhaps best read as a guide to using philosophical analysis to bring clarity to everyday discourse on public affairs.

*Reading his work, one comes to a realization: The development of Hook's own thought may be best understood through his polemics with more recent ideological, political, and philosophical movements.*

One could say a great deal about how Hook brought philosophical analysis to bear on public discourse, but one feature of his approach that is especially relevant to our evaluation of his reputation is the role he assigned to polemic. It is significant that the title of one of Hook's best-known essays is "The Ethics of Controversy" — not "The Ethics of Discussion" or "of Discourse." Hook writes that "Discussion is the lifeblood of the democratic process, and, wherever discussion flourishes, controversy is sure to arise." Given Hook's well-known penchant for polemic, one cannot help but read a bit into this and similar statements and feel that Hook, in the course of prescribing the limits of, is also beginning to make the case for polemic as a necessary part of democratic discourse.

Looking back over Hook's life work, we can see that his affinity for polemic has deep intellectual roots. First there is Hook's Marxism, in which thinking itself is understood as a dialectical process necessarily involving a clash of various interests. In this respect, it is interesting to note that another important product of Hook's youth, the book *From Hegel to Marx: Studies in the Intellectual Development of Karl Marx*, explicates Marx's thought by presenting it as a development of his polemics with various



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members of the Young Hegelian movement. After reading that work one comes to a realization: The development of Hook's own thought may be best understood through his polemics with more recent ideological, political, and philosophical movements.

Then there is Hook's pragmatism, the essence of which is the maxim that the truth of an idea is determined by putting it to some sort of a test. Applied to politics, pragmatism views public policy as a series of experiments to be tested. But tested how? The editors of *Essential Essays* sum up Hook's answer in their introduction:

> Following Dewey, Hook offers what he calls the "method of intelligence," or the "experimental method." What are the principles of this method? According to Hook, its principles are derived from the experimentalist epistemology embodied in the methods of science. Most generally, the experimental method treats all proposals as hypotheses to be tested. It recognizes only experimental results as reasons in favor or against a proposal. It acknowledges challenges, suggestions, and alternative proposals from every quarter of the community.

Testing the truth of multiple policy proposals assumes not merely debate but vigorous debate among their supporters. Thus, Hook writes in "The Ethics of Controversy": "One of [democratic society's] basic assumptions is that truth of fact and wisdom of policy can be more readily achieved through the lively interchange of ideas and opinions than by unchallengeable edicts on the part of a self-perpetuating elite."

Again, given Hook's career as a controversialist, it is fair to stretch his words just a bit here and see that, for him, polemic is a kind of scientific instrument and public debate a proving ground of political policy. For this reason a reader already familiar with Hook's work comes away from reading *Essential Essays* with a sense that something is missing, specifically a sample of Hook's polemics. The obvious candidate for inclusion here is Hook's exchange with Russell on war and peace in the nuclear age.

Realizing that polemic was, for Hook, an extension of scientific method helps one understand one of Hook's more highly praised intellectual propensities. Certainly most thinkers with whom he crossed swords found him an obstinate opponent, but when he felt he had been hit he admitted so willingly. Ernest Hook, in his introduction to *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*, notes several examples of his father making such admissions (and also of Hook being unusually good-natured to his adversaries). It is almost as if Hook felt it was a democratic and ethical imperative to pour all his energy into political debate — but also regarded every debate as a kind of experiment to be observed with scientific detachment. A defeat was not a bad outcome, but simply a scientific datum which, whether positive or negative, was to be dispassionately noted.

Of course the greatest example of Hook's ability to admit he was wrong was his forthright rejection, when the relevant evidence came in, of his cherished brainchild, *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx*. The more one pores over the volumes here under



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review, the more one sees this episode as not only pivotal in Hook's career, but emblematic of his style of thought. *Karl Marx* required tremendous passion to compose, but also tremendous detachment to disown. Today one does not often see such a combination of emotional commitment and intellectual distance. Present political discussion has been, as it were, broken in half. In political journalism, the many practitioners of the various identity politics on the left, and of blood-and-soil apologetics on the right, all accept that "the personal is political" and offer up their torrents of emotion as analysis. The academic world is characterized by a mania for impersonality and scientific, or sometimes scientistic, method. Hook represents a thinker who united these two worlds, and for that reason he deserves to be considered a kind of hero.

# From Citizen to Consumer

## *By* Elizabeth Arens

Lizabeth Cohen. *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America.* Knopf. 576 pages. $35.00

Soon after the September 11 attacks, members of the Bush administration exhorted Americans to demonstrate their patriotism by maintaining high levels of consumer spending. President Bush declared that the American economy was "open for business," and Vice President Cheney urged Americans not to let terrorists "throw off their normal level of economic activity." Many pundits and social critics proclaimed that the republic had reached a new low. But readers of Harvard historian Lizabeth Cohen's new book, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, will likely conclude that we have been residing in these particular depths for many decades. In her expansive study, Cohen aims to demonstrate the importance of mass consumption to all dimensions of American society in the years following World War II: its residential and commercial landscapes; its class consciousness, gender norms, and race relations; its political ideals and forms of political action. "Mass consumption did not only deliver wonderful things for the purchase," she writes, "it also dictated the most central dimensions of postwar society . . . with major consequences for how Americans made a living, where they dwelled, how they interacted with others, what they expected of government, and much else." By reviewing the history of postwar America through the lens of consumption, Cohen wants to show "that mass consumption had become the central defining engine, not simply of the American economy but of its politics and culture as well."

Cohen begins her story in the Depression, when the idea of the consumer as a distinct yet all-enveloping social category first arose. When Americans before the 1930s "contem-

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plated what made for the most robust national economy, the most stable American polity, and the most independent citizenry," Cohen writes, "they overwhelmingly pointed to the vitality of production." During the Depression, however, consumption came to be recognized as the activity at the heart of the American economy. The focus on consumers was conspicuous among the nation's policymakers, especially President Franklin Roosevelt's "Brains Trust." Progressive thinkers imagined consumers as an independent interest group that could counterbalance business and labor. New Deal agencies such as the National Recovery Administration first gave government representation to consumers as such, and new regulatory laws aimed at protecting consumers, including the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, were enacted late in the 1930s.

At the same time, as Cohen explains in a somewhat weak section on the period's economic thought, Keynesian economic theory gained influence in the United States. The prevailing economic doctrine, Say's Law, held that production and consumption would automatically reach equilibrium. Keynes argued that while this was true, it was possible for equilibrium to occur at varying levels of economic vitality. A mature economy such as that of the United States might conceivably remain in a depressed state indefinitely. Some stimulus was needed, and that had to come from government measures to boost consumer spending. Thus, along with radical New Deal efforts to channel money to needy Americans came an equally radical rhetoric that urged them to abandon habits of thrift and spend their money quickly.

The New Deal also saw a rise in grassroots consumer activism. In the words of a contemporary *Harvard Business Review* article, Americans showed an increasing "dissatisfaction with the goods and services and the marketing practices involved in their distribution" and a greater "demand for information and protection in the market." They responded by putting pressure on both businesses and government through an upsurge in consumer education classes, product-testing agencies such as Consumers' Research, organized strikes against high prices, and lobbying on consumer issues. A majority of these campaigns were led by women who, in Cohen's words, channeled "the role assigned to them in the household" into greater political participation and influence. African Americans — who were losing jobs disproportionately during the Depression and were confronted with

*The citizen consumer ideal promoted a more active and vigilant public, enabled political assertion among relatively powerless groups such as women and blacks, and prescribed more state intervention in the economy.*



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inferior merchandise and higher prices — also stepped up attempts to wield their consumer spending power in the 1930s. Boycotts, "Don't buy where you can't work" movements, and campaigns to support black-owned businesses proliferated.

In the multiplicity of consumer-related ideas and activities that arose in the 1930s, Cohen discerns two dominant and rival strains. The first was found in grassroots consumer activism and the belief of many New Dealers that consumers deserved protection by, and representation in, the government. This was the ideal of the "citizen consumer," according to which the consumer, with "government as ally," acted inside and outside the marketplace to "safeguard the rights of individual consumers and the larger general good." The second strain, encouraged by Keynesian ideas about underconsumption, was the "purchaser consumer" ideal, which held that consumers could best promote the general good by spending liberally to buy whatever was in their individual interests. Of these two ideals, Cohen obviously prefers the first. The citizen consumer ideal promoted a more active and vigilant public, gave opportunities for political assertion to relatively powerless groups such as women and blacks, and prescribed more state intervention in the economy. All of this Cohen clearly favors but does not explicitly defend. The purchaser consumer ideal, on the other hand, encouraged citizens to trust businesses to provide them with high-quality goods at fair prices, to disengage politically and not press government to extend its reach into the economy, and to indulge their desires without restraint. Cohen does not so much openly denounce purchaser consumers as use value-laden language to cast aspersion on that ideal.

Cohen's presentation of the purchaser consumer ideal is not entirely negative. In its formative period, she depicts the ideal as having strong democratic and egalitarian elements. New Dealers embraced Keynesianism in part because it argued that "dynamic consumer demand depended on a wide distribution of purchasing power," making economic egalitarianism a virtual economic necessity. This notion was carried forth into the postwar period, when robust consumer spending was seen as essential to sustaining growth and preventing a relapse into depression. Mass consumption was expected to both elevate and equalize the overall standard of living, dissolving barriers of social status as the working class surged into a "mass middle class." Cohen argues, however, that the egalitarian aspirations of the purchaser consumer ideal were not ultimately fulfilled. The economic and social structures of the postwar period sustained old inequalities and encouraged new ones. The remainder of her book is dedicated to explaining how this occurred.

DURING THE Second World War, the purchaser consumer ideal went into remission. Government spending on the military was sufficient to support the economy; what was needed from consumers was to restrain their consumption so that precious raw materials would not be diverted from the war effort. Rationing and price-control systems were established, and these were enforced through extensive bureaucracies of citizen consumers, again mostly



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women. Yet Cohen suggests that the purchaser consumer ideal was never really discarded: Consumers were exhorted merely to stifle temporarily their consumer urges, which could then be released during the anticipated abundance of the postwar economy. Wartime advertising promised spectacular new products, and government campaigns for war bonds appealed both to present patriotic obligation and to future consumer pleasures that wartime savings would make possible. At the end of the war, many Americans, including labor and women's groups, hoped that the government and consumer activists would continue to play a significant role in the postwar economy. These groups, however, lost out to retailing and manufacturing associations that argued that releasing controls and letting the free market reign were the real path to higher productivity and prosperity. President Truman phased out the majority of wage and price controls in 1946, and the consumer movement withered in the postwar period.

Businesses promoting an unfettered free market and the purchaser consumer ideal received considerable support from the growing international rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. Free enterprise linked with mass consumption came to be seen as the heart of "the American Way of Life." Cohen writes that mass consumption was viewed as "evidence of economic egalitarianism," of "an abundance that beat the Soviets at their own game of creating the classless society." In this way, the prewar Keynesians' hopeful linkage of mass consumption with egalitarianism gained new emphasis. Other central American ideals came to be identified with consumer society.

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The nineteenth-century archetype of the independent working man was revitalized, only now the working man gained independence through consumption rather than production. Stated Eisenhower: "An American working man can own his own comfortable home and car . . . he is not the downtrodden, impoverished vassal of whom Karl Marx wrote." Similarly, advertising and political speeches conflated consumers' free choice in the marketplace with such political liberties as free speech and the right to choose one's representatives.

According to Cohen, these images amounted to "an elaborate, integrated ideal of economic abundance and democratic political freedom, both equitably distributed," which "became almost a national civic religion from the late 1940s into the 1970s." She labels this paradigm "the Consumers' Republic." It was a comforting vision, she argues, for it "promised the socially progressive end of economic equality without requiring the politically progressive means of redistributing wealth."

The role of the state in the Consumers' Republic was complex. The federal government did not take charge of directing the economy to the degree desired by advocates of central planning, nor did it act as a restraint on business in the manner that citizen consumers had hoped. But its involvement in the economy did exceed that of any prewar period, including the New Deal. Most of this involvement was geared toward boosting and maintaining Americans' purchasing power. On the necessity of this, business, economists, and labor agreed. The Employment Act of 1946 announced the government's responsibility to "promote maximum employment, production, and purchasing power." A variety of federal programs contributed to this end, including the 1944 GI Bill, federal highway construction, social programs such as unemployment insurance and Social Security, the Veterans Administration, and the Federal Housing Administration.

Cohen acknowledges a surge in general prosperity during the postwar period. The national output of goods and services doubled from 1946 to 1956, and did so again by 1970. Both mean and median family incomes doubled from 1949 to 1973. Home ownership leaped, as did purchases of automobiles and home appliances. Yet Cohen claims that "the universal prosperity and equality assumed to be intrinsic to a vital mass consumption economy succeeded more in making promises than in ensuring delivery." The Consumers' Republic did not become a classless society.

Part of the reason for this, Cohen argues, was that the opportunities pledged to citizens, especially veterans, in the postwar period were not in fact available to all. A study published by the University of Chicago in 1951 reported that the GI Bill had provided strikingly little social mobility to American workers. Few of those veterans who had not, before the war, planned to attend college made use of college scholarships — in part because a majority had not completed high school. The working class's ability to take advantage of loans to buy homes or start businesses was similarly circumscribed. The GI Bill channeled its



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funds through existing real estate and financial institutions, which were reluctant to lend to working-class veterans who lacked property or credit records. Veterans scaled back their aspirations and became willing to return to their old jobs.

Though the egalitarian aspirations of the Consumers' Republic never extended to sexual or racial equality, Cohen assesses those aspirations on these fronts as well. Even more than members of the working class, African Americans were deprived of the benefits available to veterans in the postwar period. Moreover, the segregation enforced in the public spaces of Southern states spread to the North and West as growing numbers of blacks moved to these regions. Discrimination in and exclusion from commercial activity became a principal source of frustration and anger as blacks were exposed to the prosperous images and egalitarian rhetoric of the Consumers' Republic but found that its fruits were denied to them. Increasingly, however, blacks were able to channel their influence as consumers to bring about changes in these policies and in racial attitudes more broadly.

Cohen sees the postwar period as one of considerable retrenchment in the status of women. The waning of the consumer movement saw the end of a primary avenue for women's political participation. Men discharged from the military recovered many of the new responsibilities women had assumed during the war. Women — even most female veterans — had no access to the opportunities for advancement and self-reliance provided by the GI Bill. Single women were rarely granted mortgages or access to credit, while married women found that their husbands were required to be the legal holders of any mortgages or accounts. Divorced, separated, and widowed women were left with no credit standing at all. Women even lost power within the realm of consumption, Cohen argues, as their husbands, who supplied the income and had access to credit, commonly made decisions regarding the substantial purchases (of cars, furniture, appliances) of the postwar era.

*Class distinctions soon reasserted themselves, as white-collar residents moved on to new developments with larger houses and a more exclusive residency. In the succeeding decades, suburbia became highly stratified.*

The residential arrangement of postwar America perpetuated existing inequalities and contributed to new ones, Cohen suggests, as suburbia became the "distinctive landscape of the Consumers' Republic." Fed by highway construction, VA mortgages, and the desire to escape overcrowded, often deteriorating city buildings, the suburban population increased by 43 percent between 1947 and 1953.



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Suburbanization gave a majority of Americans their first opportunity for property ownership, and it raised the standard of living for millions. Initial suburban developments such as Levittown were designed to serve the "mass middle class" imagined by the Consumers' Republic, with a balance of white-collar and blue-collar residents. But class distinctions soon reasserted themselves, as white-collar residents moved on to new developments with larger houses and a more exclusive residency. In the succeeding decades, suburbia became highly stratified, Cohen writes, as people "selected among homogenous suburbs occupying distinctive rungs in a clear status hierarchy of communities." Builders began to target their new projects at specific populations through lot size, home size, and community attributes, giving their developments "instant socioeconomic identities." Once established, wealthier communities preserved their class character through use of zoning laws establishing minimum lot sizes and prohibiting multiple-family dwellings.

Zoning laws were designed especially with an eye toward keeping out undesirable races. Indeed, Cohen perceives that "race was intrinsic to the process of postwar suburbanization." Fear of the swelling population of blacks in Northern cities supplied an additional motivation to whites thinking of moving out. For white homeowners, these fears were amplified, for the dynamic real estate market of the postwar period made "property values" a newly salient concern. As middle-class blacks moved into the first rings of suburbs around many urban areas, the process repeated itself. White communities erected barriers against black entry through zoning, red-lining (by which mortgage lenders labeled black or racially mixed areas an undesirable financial risk), and informal agreements among homeowners and real estate agents in the area. Thus, racial prejudice, combined with an unprecedented commodification of the home, created a Northern landscape segregated even more by race than by class.

The postwar stratification of American communities meant that municipal services would be unequally distributed. With higher incomes and smaller populations, wealthier towns were able to service their needs even with low tax rates, while cities were left with a poorer population needing more services and struggled to fund them with higher tax rates. The amenities provided by suburban communities also came to include elaborate new shopping centers. These offered proximity to the suburbs, ample parking, a precise mix of stores, and a safe, carefully controlled environment. Suburban malls soon drew shoppers away from urban downtowns, contributing to the economic deterioration of those areas. Like the communities in which they were situated, shopping centers came to be designed with specific social classes in mind. And mall owners succeeded in excluding entirely undesirable urban elements such as beggars, the homeless, and racial minorities.

By the end of the 1960s, the idea of mass consumption at the heart of the Consumers' Republic became obsolete, writes Cohen. A majority of sellers in the 1940s and 50s still aimed their goods at an average, middle-class "Mr. and Mrs. Consumer." But the marketers they hired to do this more effec-



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tively, assisted by the budding academic discipline of sociology, soon began to perceive within the mass a multitude of different subsectors. The process began with the recognition that people with different income levels differed in their tastes, preferences, and aspirations in addition to their disposable wealth. Marketers went on to break consumers down by age, gender, race, ethnic background, education, and geography. The assumption was now that members of different social sectors were "profoundly different in [their] mode of thinking and way of handling the world," in the words of sociologist-turned-marketer Pierre Martineau. Advertisements, and even the products themselves, were soon designed with one or another market segment in mind. Cohen describes the result as "a new commercial culture that reified — at times even exaggerated — social difference." Thus, consumption, imagined as a means by which American society would be leveled and unified, became instead a locus and source of social divisions.

Has Cohen succeeded in providing a new vision of postwar American history? It must be said that many of her arguments are not wholly original, having appeared in the literature of various historical subspecialties. Women's historians have written on the gender norms of the reconversion period, the field of urban studies includes many volumes on the process of suburbanization, and cultural historians have described the rise of marketing and its links with sociology. Cohen's principal accomplishment is to bring all of these ideas together into a single volume, organized around the theme of consumption.

Still, a few things are lost in the process. I found myself wishing for greater attention to the language of the period and for an in-depth look at a particular family or town. Cohen's prose is not always the liveliest, and she aggravates the textbook-like feel of the narrative with the separate sections on women and blacks that appear at regular intervals. If their stories are central to the history of postwar America, one would think Cohen could find a way to integrate them into the main narrative. More important, Cohen fits so much material under the framework of consumption that the theme begins to lose any power to structure her argument and research. Lunch counter sit-ins for civil rights and the class stratification of the suburbs both involve consumption, but in such different ways that I am not sure what greater insights are achieved

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by placing them side-by-side.

Cohen's use of the paradigm of the Consumers' Republic is a bit flabby as well. Her identification of this ideal — in which each individual's expenditures benefited overall prosperity and a rising tide lifted all boats without painful or controversial redistribution by political means — as the animating creed of postwar society is insightful. But the standards by which she judges the Consumers' Republic are far beyond the hopes of even the more utopian of its postwar proponents. Cohen is indignant because the Consumers' Republic did not produce a perfectly classless society — but what was the likelihood that it would? What it did achieve is impressive — a dramatic rise in the standard of living and a more equal division of wealth than anytime before or, for that matter, since. And Cohen's sections on women and African Americans bring a different, and entirely current, set of values to bear on the Consumers' Republic. Her sections on women feel especially anachronistic: The independent, career-minded woman was never a part of the Consumers' Republic ideal; rather, the aspiration was for a society in which even working-class husbands earned enough to allow their wives to concentrate their attentions on home and family. It is apparent how Cohen feels about this arrangement, but she gives us little insight into how women viewed it in the 1940s and 50s.

Which brings me to the problem of Cohen's politics, which are ever-present throughout the book. She is either incapable of or unsatisfied by the neutral exploration of a historical phenomenon, yet she rarely endorses or condemns anything outright. Instead she imbues her writing with opinion through subtle or unsubtle value-laden language, in the manner of "oppressive," "inequitable," and "heroic." It is the kind of writing that assumes the reader shares Cohen's beliefs, and it will be a major irritant to any reader who does not. Cohen's politics also lead to more serious distortions. A recurrent theme in the book is that the divisions and inequalities of the Consumers' Republic resulted from the postwar decision to leave major sectors of the American economy in the hands of the private market. For instance, Cohen writes that "the extent to which private real estate markets shaped postwar suburban communities over time exacerbated inequalities." But after reading her detailed explication of the class, race, and gender discrimination of federal agencies such as the VA and FHA, one has to wonder why she imagines that public control of residential development would have yielded more equitable results.

In this tendency, Cohen follows a genre of history writing that blames various social ills of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on the imperatives of an ever-expanding and intensifying "market." Cohen, like others in this school, appears to forget that what she terms the market is really an aggregation of decisions made by individuals. In fact, Cohen presents plenty of evidence indicating that Americans in the postwar period preferred to live among people of a similar class and race and took advantage of the opportunities afforded by the development of new residential communities to do just that. But though she disapproves of these decisions, to call the American public selfish, cowardly, or uncivic would cast



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doubt on her faith in the sanctity of democracy, so she evades these judgments by placing blame on impersonal market forces.

Still, *A Consumers' Republic* is a valuable study of a time in American history that is beginning to recede from view. Cohen brings together important recent work from many historical fields and gives it an original spin, pointing out the centrality of consumption. She presents a wealth of material in ways that will inspire further debate and study. We could rightfully have hoped for a book that is less dutiful, more imaginative, and freer of political bias, but Cohen has done us a service nonetheless.

# The Banality Of Fictions

## *By* Benjamin Wallace-Wells

Stephen Glass. *The Fabulist.* Simon & Schuster. 339 pages. $24.00

By the end of *The Fabulist*, the protagonist — whose name, like the author's, is Stephen Glass — has certainly been through the wringer. Protagonist Glass has been fired from a hip and hot Washington political magazine for making up his stories; he has become a public piñata of the Jayson Blair sort; his friends have retrospectively retracted their friendship and his girlfriend has dumped him; he's stalked by reporters who show up cleverly disguised as pizza deliverymen and bank customers and, worse, by his hectoring, loving Jewish parents; he's achieved a false kind of redemption by working as a shift supervisor at a suburban video store; he's found true redemption in a mah-jongg circle of grandmothers he met at synagogue; he's located true love in a tense, pretty gambling addict and moved to the suburbs. The book's climax comes at a Virginia animal hospital where Glass has come to join his true love, who is there because her dog's penis has swollen to unnatural proportions. The dog is a Lhasa Apso named Milton Rosenbaum. I wish I were making some of this up.

Stylistically, the book is a disaster. Glass the author never achieves either tragedy or comedy; his novel substitutes self-pity for tragedy and slapstick for comedy and then seesaws between them. His characters are so sketchily drawn that you can't even form mental pictures of them; I spent a good bulk of the book laboring under the impression that Glass's girlfriend was Brazilian before discovering, on page 118, that she was actually a Jewish girl from South Orange, New Jersey. And whatever *deus* Glass happens to be employing, he's certainly at his *machina* — whenever the author needs an easy way out of a scene, a pager goes off or his protagonist's hour with a shrink is up or his mother calls. It's bad enough that his fringe characters evolve in the cadences of cliché — no one changes or surprises you — and that the reader

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gets the distinct impression that Glass purloined his players from the Phillip Roth Repertory Company and then flattened them. What's worse is that his protagonist is hopelessly two-dimensional, too: a cloying, nerdy boy who makes up his stories because he "wanted people to love me more" and finds eventual solace in giving up the fast-paced urbs for a simple suburban life, complete with rabbi. It reads, throughout, like a bad sitcom, humorless, campy, and seen before.

Stephen Glass, the real-life author, lived most of these events himself, or at least the crucial ones. He was a 25-year-old, smart-alecky writer for the *New Republic* when he was caught making up facts; after he was fired in 1998, the magazine investigated and concluded there were "substantial" fabrications in more than four-fifths of his stories, and Glass became the subject of an intense if short-lived media frenzy. There is some divergence; in the novel, the disgraced Glass went on to work in a video store, while the real-life Glass went to law school. But in general, reviews have taken this novel as Glass's explanation of what, exactly, went wrong. Someone — either the author or the publisher — decided to begin this book with the moment that Glass gets fired, a choice which in one fell swoop eliminates the interesting part of the story — how Stephen Glass came to be "The Fabulist." Instead, we are left with the self-pitying and much less interesting story of what Stephen Glass did to recover from being the fabulist.

It's too bad that Glass butchered his own story so badly that few will read it, because his novel — which purports to give the "why" and the "how" behind his real-life lies — could have told us a lot about contemporary journalism, and, particularly, could have directed us to understand in a way that few commentators have so far the case of Jayson Blair, the young *New York Times* national reporter caught fabricating countless details in numerous stories in a scandal that would ultimately bring down the paper's top editors, Howell Raines and Gerald Boyd. The main narrative that has emerged from the public pontifications about Blair and Glass is that journalism has become too ambitious for its own good: In its quest to be lyrical, analytical, and to have voice, journalism today puts inexperienced reporters on too-important assignments and relegates fact-finding and fact-checking to a low place on its priorities list. The more telling truth may be that journalism, which lets bad cliché pass for lyricism, has not been ambitious enough.

One of the irritatingly big flaws in *The Fabulist* is that Glass's world is populated by rather brittle clichés. Loving, hectoring Jewish grandmothers who play mahjongg and set Glass up with their granddaughters. Earnest rabbis. A woman, whom the book sneers at as a totem of white trash middle America, who dresses all in purple, capped by a sweatshirt that says "I Love Purple." What is disturbing about Glass's nonfiction is that his characters were equally thin, equally campy, no more credible.

The story that finally tripped up journalist Glass at the *New Republic* was a thoroughly invented story about computer companies in a bidding war to recruit and hire teenage hackers. The



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piece, called "Hack Heaven," began like this:

> Ian Restil, a 15-year-old computer hacker who looks like an even more adolescent version of Bill Gates, is throwing a tantrum. "I want more money. I want a Miata. I want a trip to Disney World. I want *X-Men* comic book number one. I want a lifetime subscription to *Playboy*, and throw in *Penthouse*. Show me the money! Show me the money!" Over and over again, the boy, who is wearing a frayed Cal Ripken Jr. t-shirt, is shouting his demands. Across the table, executives from a California software firm called Jukt Micronics are listening — and trying ever so delicately to oblige. "Excuse me, sir," one of the suits says, tentatively, to the pimply teenager. "Excuse me. Pardon me for interrupting you, sir. We can arrange more money for you. Then, you can buy the comic book, and then, when you're of more, say, appropriate age, you can buy the car and pornographic magazines on your own."

Glass was caught in this invention not by his editors at the *New Republic,* but by a reporter at *Forbes Digital Tool*, the online version of the financial magazine, who was interested in writing a follow-up to "Hack Heaven." When that reporter tried to find the principals in Glass's piece, he discovered pretty quickly that none of them, technically, existed and phoned Glass's bosses at the *New Republic*. It turned out Glass had been lying, routinely and brazenly, in most of the 30 or so articles he'd written over the previous 18 months.

Two months earlier, the *New Republic* had published a piece of Glass's about the Wall Street cult of Alan Greenspan. The first paragraph is a scene-setter describing the frantic lives of bond traders at a fictional firm called RBL. The second paragraph, which was later found to be fabricated whole cloth, ran like this:

> But once a year, RBL permits its indefatigable drones a brief respite. At about three o'clock in the afternoon on March 6, nearly all of the traders drop whatever they're doing and file into a conference room. For the next 15 minutes, they pass around a card, bring out a cake, and sing "Happy Birthday." "But when we come to the last line — 'Happy Birthday to yooo' — there's always this awkward pause because no one knows who's supposed to blow out the candles," says Ron Thompson, a senior trader. "He never shows up to his own party. I'm not sure we even invite him." Not that it would matter. You see, the birthday honoree is not a colleague at RBL but a man most of the celebrants have never met: Alan Greenspan, the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board. The birthday party, Thompson says, is "our little way of saying thank you and hoping for another year of health and prosperity and good interest rates. . . . He's been good to us, and it's a way to honor him."

The story, titled "Praised Be Greenspan," goes on to describe a made-up "shrine" to Greenspan that



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the traders tend, tenderly.

Over the past two months, several of Glass's former colleagues and friends have published reviews of *The Fabulist* trying to explain how Glass got away with lying for so long. They've said that Glass was so meticulous about fact-checking other people's articles and such a likeable, hard-working writer

*Glass's fables are not muted inventions that might slip quietly under the credulity radar. They are gaudy, rococo constructions, cartoonish fictions. Real people simply don't behave like that. This is fabulism camp.*

that he was the last journalist they would have suspected of fabulism on such a grand scale. I'm sure this is true. But Glass's fables are not muted inventions that might slip quietly under the credulity radar. They are gaudy, rococo constructions, cartoonish fictions. Real people simply don't behave like that — real people don't create shrines to Alan Greenspan. Real people are more complex. This is fabulism camp. That Glass got away with it for so long suggests more than just that Glass handled the personal politics of the *New Republic* office well enough to deflect suspicion. It says that the magazine did not demand a very sophisticated product — the Glass articles they published described a world in which people exist in caricature, in which character is reduced to cliché.

When compared to Stephen Glass, Jayson Blair's fabrications at the *New York Times* are not so campy — indeed, they tend toward the banal. A pair of his stories about Private Jessica Lynch's country family told of a house with "cramped living room" with an "overstuffed green love seat"; a "small, tin-roofed home" which looked out over a tobacco field. He quoted a family friend named Glenn Nelson calling Jessica Lynch "a wholesome West Virginia country girl." It turns out Nelson never described Lynch that way to Blair, or anyone else, and the visual scene of Lynch's small country town, Palestine, West Virginia, was not only dead wrong but entirely made up — Blair had never been there, and wrote these stories from his Brooklyn apartment. Many of his other made-up stories — about a family waiting to hear news of their soldier son in Iraq, or a Midwestern university cracking down on unsightly football tailgaters — evolve in the same cadences of cliché. So do the tainted stories of the lyrical, Pulitzer-winning *New York Times* reporter Rick Bragg, who was suspended by the paper when the Blair investigations turned up evidence that he had not, in fact, seen many of the scenes he described in his stories — a lonely Florida oysterman poling around the bay and worrying about his lousy catch, for instance.

What is intriguing is not just the fact of these fabrications but their content. In place of reporting, Blair offers very simple clichés — the sort of scene a



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sneering New York comedian might construct as a joke about hick country. Had Blair actually gone to West Virginia, of course, he would have come up with a better, more compelling story — one that diverged from stereotype — and would have constructed more nuanced characters than his imagination alone could conjure. The striking thing about Blair's fabrications is that they are more banal than the truth.

But that didn't matter. For Blair's editors at the *New York Times*, this was tasty stuff — flavorful and descriptive. Blair, only 27, had been on the fast track to big assignments and big stories since his intern days five years before. Stereotypes like these were what got him ahead. There are disappointing echoes of Glass here. Two of the most prestigious periodicals in the country, the *New York Times* and the *New Republic*, seem altogether too comfortable in the belief that most people live their lives bound into crass cultural stereotypes. The level of condescension here is disturbing.

Worse, however, is that to readers of the *New York Times* or the *New Republic* or most other ambitious journalistic outlets around the country, Glass's or Blair's stories would not have seemed out of the ordinary — at least in one important way. Over the past quarter-century, newspaper and magazine journalists, who have come to see themselves in competition not only with other newspapers and magazines but also with television, radio, the internet, books, movies, and all other ways in which people spend their time, have made it a priority to tell better stories. The anecdotal lead, which gives a visual scene to illustrate an article's larger point, has become universal (anecdotal leads also account for nearly all of Blair's and Glass's fabrications). But the leads need to make a vivid case for the story — if the story is about, say, the failures of welfare reform, the struggling former welfare recipient the author starts with had better be really, vividly struggling — and so the nuance of these characters tends to be lost.

After I left college, I spent about two-and-a-half years as a reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*'s metro desk. I filed countless stories with these sorts of leads. Again and again, my editors — deeply talented, frequently prize-winning journalists — asked me to go back and try to find a stronger anecdote. *It's very good*, they'd tell me, *but can't we find someone who makes our case a little more strongly?* In other words, can't we find someone whose life exactly echoes the abstract idea we're trying to convey in the piece? Can't we find someone whose life has been stripped of nuance and then write about it?

The problem is that journalists have come to expect and value cliché. Trying to make imagery vivid and turn big ideas into intellectually manageable sound bites has mostly made journalism better, but the effort has sacrificed some needed nuance. Jayson Blair could not have told a more complex story about Palestine, West Virginia without visiting it. All he had to rely on, writing from Brooklyn, were secondhand cultural stereotypes. Stephen Glass, inventing characters from thin air, necessarily battered them into two dimensions; for them to be more nuanced, he would have had to meet



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them. They were able to get away with their fabrications for as long as they did because they met their editors' expectations, which in turn tells us that those who supervised them simply did not expect enough.

The *Times* and the *New Republic* have said, in their own defense, that it would have been nearly impossible for any newspaper or magazine to preempt the fabrications of reporters so willfully bent on lying as Jayson Blair and Stephen Glass. To a certain extent, that's true, and Glass, in a section of *The Fabulist* in which he describes how he duped the *New Republic*'s fact-checkers, shows why: Even the most rigorous checkers, without the resources to go out and re-report each and every story, always reach a point where they simply have to take the reporter's word for it.

But the *Times* and the *New Republic* shouldn't let themselves off so easily. By stressing anecdotal writing, storytelling, and self-conscious lyricism, as most ambitious newspapers and magazines do, journalists are increasingly writing themselves into a pretty parochial corner. Urban yuppies writing for urban yuppies, they recapitulate the pieties of their group: West Virginians are uneducated hicks, or bond traders are worshipful, silly, and sheep-like, Greenspan their shepherd.

Jonathan Chait, a colleague and friend of Glass's at the *New Republic*, wrote in a review of *The Fabulist* that the novel, with its flat characters and outlandish detail, was not stylistically distinguishable from the invented magazine stories Glass wrote five years ago as nonfiction. This is both true and telling.

Stephen Glass cheated his readers by writing his story as fiction. The cover of genre let him give his friends and colleagues invented names and to write them as garish caricature. An honest memoir would have been a better book. Confronted with the necessary nuance of actual events and real people, Glass would have had to think more deeply about the reasons why he made up his stories and the reasons why his colleagues let him get away with it. Had he done that, he might have produced a more vivid and telling commentary on the psychology of deception — and a more sophisticated and defensible criticism of contemporary journalism.

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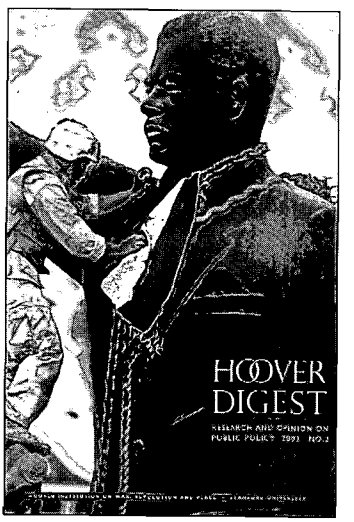


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